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The purpose of this study is to critically investigate the concepts of forgiveness through philosophical, religious, historical, and practical lenses. The aim is to determine how the application of forgiving behaviors may be effective in creating and sustaining moral relations and social justice consciousness whether or not an offense has occurred. Forgiving behaviors are defined as those human capacities, such as empathy, sympathy, love, benevolence, and trust that are referenced as ethics of forgiveness, and are determined to be essential to humanitarian practices among local and global communities. Through a qualitative case study methodology, the study focuses on the deeply embedded Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Testimonies by 12 participants (four Israelis, four Palestinians, and four Americans) share their views on the role that forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness play in its resolution. Study participants viewed the military occupation of Palestinian territories by the Israeli government as oppressive practices that serve as roadblocks to conflict resolution. These practices include the building of a large cement wall that separates the two populations; one side seeing the wall as protection and the other seeing it as denying basic human needs. The wall and other policies that inhibit face-to-face human interactions, serve to dehumanize views of the other and strengthen the perceived need for separation. The study's key findings offer possibilities for change based on practices of ethics of forgiveness which reflect the ability to see others as human beings having the same human qualities as ourselves. The study recommends that the environment that can best create these practices is the educational setting that

embraces a pedagogy of forgiveness as providing hope for conflict resolution and demand for human, moral treatment of all people.

*Keywords:* forgiveness, ethics of forgiveness, pedagogy of forgiveness, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, oppression, conflict resolution

TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF FORGIVENESS: LESSONS FROM THE  
ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

by

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Approved by

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To my sons, Weston (בנימין) and Jesse (ישי) Altman  
who embrace the Jewish teachings  
of *Tikkun Olam*

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### AN INTRODUCTION TO FORGIVENESS

#### Prologue

פְּנִי רֵאָתָהּ כִּי פָנֶיךָ רָאִיתִי בֶן-עַל כִּי מִיָּדִי, מִנְחָתִי וְלִקְחָתָהּ, בְּעֵינֶיךָ חֵן מָצָאתִי נָא-אֵם נָא-אֵל, יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר  
וַתֵּרָצֶנִי—אֱלֹהִים.

Translation: And Jacob said: Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favour in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. (*Torah*, Genesis 33:10)

I chose to begin my work with this biblical quote as its message conveys the essence of humanism—to see the other as we see ourselves. I see this message as the foundation of human wisdom, that is, to *know* that the other is a human being with all the human qualities and capacities that G-d has bestowed on all of us. Given this foundation, I approach forgiveness from a holistic lens that encompasses the spiritual, sociological, philosophical, and psychological aspects of our being.

#### Situating Myself as Researcher

Believing that the integrity of this study of forgiveness is grounded in my professional and personal commitments to principles of social justice and moral repair, it is important that I situate myself within its frameworks in order to acknowledge my subjective, yet consistently scholarly stance as researcher.

My interest in understanding forgiveness does not come from a single experience or desire. As part of a larger social and political community, I am deeply affected by the

incidents of harm experienced by human beings at the hands of other humans, even amounting to actual destruction at times. For example, my introduction to the teachings of Judaism embedded a personal belief that above all else, we, as human beings, need to regard all of G-d's creations with dignity and respect. It was from these teachings that my commitment to practices of the Jewish faith began. For years since, I have been deeply troubled by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (which I will later address as the central focus of this study). At the time of this writing, I am equally troubled by the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino, California, which are being reported worldwide, on the heels of similar terrorist attacks in Paris, France, both of which resulted in massive deaths and injuries. Within my smaller community, I am also affected by the disregard for human life that seems to appear as a daily occurrence through established political policies that are justified as necessary for the good of the majority. I am concerned about our current educational system, which I regard as part of my smaller community. In this context, I point to a recent experience working with groups of high school seniors who were preparing to graduate in the next six months. The group that described themselves as being from the advanced placement classes were readily sharing their hopes relative to college plans and future careers. In contrast, the group of students described by the school counselor as "non-college bound" were less enthusiastic about their future plans. Viewing this situation threw me back to my own high school experiences where I was given messages that I had little academic ability and my best choice would be to "find a secretarial position" that did not require additional education. The point of this experience is that in situations such as these individuals become labeled and accept them

as a self-identification. Therefore, my overarching interest in forgiveness is to understand how forgiveness can heal the wrongs that humans experience on both personal and social levels. Ultimately, I wish to show how forgiveness has the greatest chance of positively affecting moral, human relations when chosen as a behavior as opposed to an emotional response.

For me, a view of forgiveness as a healing process is necessary for both the person harmed and the wrongdoer in order to create moral relationships and social justice consciousness. As such, I am not sure that I would have ever been able to define forgiveness as it would apply to my own healing and personal need for reparation prior to undertaking this study. However, as a result of this research journey, I have come to realize the power of forgiveness as behaviors necessary to human healing where wrongdoing occurs on a daily basis. Reflecting on personal experiences growing up, I now recognize my own vulnerability, as a human being, to shaming experiences perpetrated by authority figures in my life, including parents and teachers. Here I can reiterate the example of being told that I was not considered academic material, which made me feel unworthy as a human being. As a young person, I was unable to get in touch with feelings of empathy and compassion for others or myself because I put all my energy into covering my feelings of shame and inadequacy. At that time, I had no conscious conception of forgiveness as a behavior that I could choose to help myself heal and feel worthwhile as a human being. It follows then, that I could not reason out the negative messages I was given by teachers; consequently, I had no understanding of forgiveness as a healing behavior. Even as a young married woman whose husband chose

to leave the marriage, I equated his decision with the wrongness of my being; in other words, that he had to be right as the person choosing to leave, and that I had to be wrong as the person responsible for his choice, thereby reinforcing my shame and vulnerability as a woman and as a human being. Through the years since my divorce and my journey as a professional woman, I have been able to see myself as a more complete human being capable of empathy and sympathy as I have developed a view of the world through a broader lens. I can also say that living a life that includes experiences with empathy and sympathy adds a richer and more satisfying way to live, especially in relationships with others. Among many areas of life, this broader worldview has inspired my interest in understanding forgiveness as a way of living that overcomes and moves beyond personal injury, opening greater possibilities for building trusting relationships.

Now, as a result of my dissertation research, I have found a new understanding of forgiveness as a way to heal and strengthen myself as opposed to negating myself. I have learned that forgiving is more about my own well-being rather than addressing the offender and his transgressions. I do not mean to suggest that the transgressor be considered as unworthy of any humanistic feelings, but I have been able—through this study process—to internalize a more profound understanding that revengeful desires (understood as the negation of a forgiving attitude) have little to no impact on personal healing. Therefore, my forgiving is not a releasing of any responsibility on the part of the offender, but instead represents a way in which I can become more compassionate in my relations with other human beings as well as more self-affirming.



Essentially, I consider myself a compassionate person who practices the Jewish faith; someone who feels empathy and sympathy for others without much provocation, needing only to imagine another's pain to experience a sense of compassion and a desire to reach out to that person in support. At this juncture, it is important to explain that I adopted the Jewish religion as my chosen faith because it was pivotal in reawakening my capacity to feel empathy and compassion for others. This is not to say that people from other religious traditions do not feel empathy and compassion for others, but for me, living a Jewish life provided a sense of belonging that I had been lacking. Having both rejected and accepted the power of forgiveness across various life experiences, I am settled on exploring its relationship with humanistic qualities and capacities that drive our interactions and relations with each other; its challenges in repairing moral relations that have been broken; its ability to define our respective worldviews, regardless of whether or not a wrong has occurred; and its possibilities with regard to capturing an understanding of forgiveness that might be taught and modeled in pedagogical settings.

As previously stated, I have come to believe that forgiveness plays an essential role in personal healing that, when expressed globally, can result in social justice consciousness. I will continue to address, in greater detail, my perspective on the relationship between social justice and forgiveness throughout this project. However, for now, I will address social justice in the context of the teachings and practices of my Jewish faith, specifically referring to the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, or repair of the world. Expanding on the literal definition of repair of the world is the connotation of social action and pursuit of social justice. Having modeled the responsibility of *Tikkun Olam* to

my children, I believe that they both have chosen to live lives that promote peaceful and loving relationships with others as a result of this element of their upbringing. By its definition, repair denotes that something has been broken and needs to be made whole again. For instance, treating others with deserved human respect is not only a belief, but an everyday practice, and, I find this true in Judaism in that it is not simply a belief, but a living practice. The same concept is true following a wrongdoing within relationships in that repair must occur through behaviors that reflect a moral, humanism consciousness. I claim that forgiveness can be a practice in which moral relationships and social justice consciousness are developed throughout communities, locally and globally.

### **The Problem/Purpose of the Study**

My problem study is exploring forgiveness as a human behavior as opposed to an emotional response to perceived wrongdoing. Using the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as my context, I want to know if forgiveness exists in the respective worldviews of those intimately involved in the conflict, and if so, how is it applied? From this isolated conflict, I may be able to draw broader conclusions about forgiveness in general.

The purpose of this study is to explore understandings of forgiveness as a behavior that encompasses ethical human capacities and moral relationships that contribute to social justice consciousness. Further, I aim to explore possibilities for understanding how forgiving behaviors might be considered essential to the repair of personal and global relationships that have been broken through acts of wrongdoing between individuals, groups of people, and even among nations. To implement this purpose, I intend to take a critical look at conceptions of forgiveness and its application

as expressed by a selected group of study subjects comprised of Israelis and Palestinians in order to explore how their individual perspectives represent (or not) their intentions towards peace and co-existence between Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine. I am interested in discovering whether or not these interviewees consider social justice consciousness essential to not only repairing wrongdoings specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but inherently essential to the ways in which we view others in relation to ourselves. While I will explore in more detail what I mean by social justice consciousness throughout my research process, in this introduction I refer to this concept as correlating to a humanistic view of others, meaning the ability to see others as having human faces, feelings, and capacities that define us as both unique individuals and necessary partners in our common humanity. It is this ability to recognize our common humanity that speaks to the line in the *Torah* of which I opened this introduction.

### **Research Questions**

To guide this qualitative, interview-driven study, I have posed four fundamental questions about forgiveness that underscore possibilities of uncovering insights into how individuals—representing traditionally distinct cultures, religions, and worldviews—might demonstrate common bonds of humanity as a practice of forgiveness. I have deliberately chosen the word “process” instead of “project” because when this study ends, my research will not. Forgiveness is not something that should be introduced and forgotten. Rather, conceptions of forgiveness understood as moral human conduct need to be continually promoted, taught, and modeled as a practice that offers the potential to heal from the harmful effects of tragedies and acts of destruction that humans, throughout

history, have inflicted upon each other. Therefore, through this work in which the personal narratives of primarily Israeli and Palestinian and American interviewees who are invested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, provide critical historical and personal contexts for examining notions of forgiveness, I look for insights into the following research questions:

1. What are the problems and challenges associated with the practice of forgiveness understood as human capacities and chosen behaviors, in the context of interpersonal relations, cultural identities and practices, and broader social conflicts and violence?
2. What role do ethics of forgiveness play in the repair of wrongdoing that has broken moral relations?
3. What is the relationship between social justice consciousness and the practice of forgiveness?
4. Can forgiveness be taught, and if so, how?

These foundational research questions underscore my study as a whole, while my interview questions, which are different, are designed to identify the personal views on forgiveness as applied to the interviewees' roles in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, my intent is to explore both theoretical concepts and practical applications in order to find a connection that can lead to an understanding of the role of forgiveness in the development of moral relations and social justice consciousness.

### **Overview of the Qualitative Interview Process**

I chose the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the framework of my qualitative research study on forgiveness because this conflict provides relevant, contemporary context to the concepts and practices of forgiveness within a socio-political scenario familiar to most people today. Within an interview process designed around both face-to-face (local study participants) and telephone or Skype interviews (for those participants located in the Middle East or elsewhere), actual Israelis and Palestinians interpreted their conceptions of forgiveness based on their real-world, lived experiences in that realm of the world. Through interview questions that I created for the study, participants provided their unique insights into the destructive effects of ongoing personal and political conflict in the region as the result of a long history of socio-political interactions based on regarding the other as enemy. In Chapter III, I will include my methodology in detail, including the development of my research questions.

Finally, in subsequent chapters, I will address my data collection and analysis processes in depth, adhering to the qualitative interview design of this study. As such, I will determine and analyze emergent themes surrounding the study problem of forgiveness understood as an intentional practice of ethical behaviors. I will address the fourth research question, can forgiveness be taught, in Chapter VI providing both theoretical concepts and actual practices that integrate principles of forgiveness into classroom activities. By couching my study of forgiveness within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I am able to demonstrate a more profound meaning to forgiveness as a practice

for achieving reconciliation and creation of moral relations, whether it be among nations, individuals, or groups of individuals.

### **Social and Political Contexts: Challenges to Forgiveness**

#### **Challenge One: The Development of Opposing Worldviews**

Forgiveness is complex. What I mean by this is that forgiveness is not like a band aid that can be put on a cut in order for healing to occur. Thus, to perceive forgiveness as a complex product of human construction is to understand that humans are complex beings who hold unique views of the world that typically emerge from their early experiences and interactions with others. When an individual's view of the world is not grounded in trust or safety around other human beings, his or her interactions with others will typically mirror that viewpoint, reflecting a general sense of mistrust and insecurity. We see this evidenced in the various negative assumptions and reactions that people have to others who represent cultures, religions, and races different from their own. I point to the recent verbal attacks in the United States against the Muslim community by political pundits and others who blame all from one culture for the violent behaviors of those at the fringe. This phenomenon lies at the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike a band aid or bandage, the application of which serves a universal purpose—healing—regardless of the nature of the wound, the psychic wounds wrought by human wrongdoing and relational misunderstandings require a more complex approach toward healing. I am suggesting that this is where forgiveness, as chosen behavior to healing personal relations, should be practiced. Sadly, if we learn to distrust and negate others early in life, a consciousness of forgiveness tends to allude us.

I offer the following, personal illustration of broken trust experienced in childhood, along with its potential, long-term impact. I remember an incident long ago as an elementary-age student, walking home from school and witnessing the torture of a young boy by an older student. I felt so helpless and full of fear as I saw the blood run down the younger boy's face as the older one pounded a rock on his head. I have absolutely no memory of what happened following that incident, but it haunts me to this day. I think it was the first time I realized that there was no safety in the world, and that pain could just as easily be inflicted upon me without any provocation or ability to be rescued. As this incident works its way into my consciousness, feelings of fear, vulnerability, and powerlessness come over me. Based on what I witnessed and how I internalized that experience, the world became a very ugly place in my mind; a place that needed to be controlled through vigilance and an internal guardedness based on the assumption that people can and will hurt others at any time or place. In my young and vulnerable mind, I internalized the message that individuals will dominate those who cannot defend themselves. The resulting feelings from this experience embedded in me what I refer to as a paranoid distrust of anyone who came into my life, which required constantly being on the defensive. I chose isolation from human contact as a protection from becoming attacked, which also isolated me from positive relational experiences. When one's worldview is shaped by incidents such as this one, moral relationships can be difficult to develop or sustain, especially when the ability to trust is absent. In my case, the more I was able to recognize the positive human capacities that I did hold I was also able to choose vulnerability and openness to relationships. Over time, I have learned to

overcome the effects of mistrust of others. This includes a new vision of the wrongdoer as a human being who, for whatever reasons, made choices that had little to do with me. Going a step further, an individual's distrustful worldview can also shape in such a way as to vilify the culture of the perpetrator of wrongful acts. In this context, the victim or observer of abuse or wrongdoing can easily assign dangerous behavior to anyone from the same culture of which the wrongdoer is a member. Consequently, the wrongdoer now is seen not as a single person, but as a reflection of a whole culture that is collectively dangerous and untrustworthy.

**The Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** Considering the impact of a worldview such as this—attributing negative characteristics associated with a particular individual or group to an entire culture—adds greatly to the challenges of repair and reconciliation on a global scale. Writing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this regard, Lerner (2012) stated, “many of the choices made on each side of this struggle make sense when considered from the standpoint of each side's assumptions about the world” (p. 255). The assumptions to which Lerner referred in this quote have developed through years of conflict, mistrust, misguided political policies, and justifications for acts of violence committed against the other in the name of defending each side's respective right to exist. Historically, attempts at reparation and reconciliation have not been successful for many reasons such as changes in political leadership that hold opposing views on causes of the conflict on both sides and/or intrusion in the process by countries with self-interests. I want to suggest that unsuccessful attempts to repair the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ignore the heart of forgiveness. In other words, such attempts do not make the human capacities



that I term ethics of forgiveness (to be explained in detail later in this chapter), central to reparation and reconciliation processes. Instead of emphasizing human capacities of forgiveness that include empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and love, with attempts at bringing peace to these two countries have traditionally relied on political interventions that have escaped practices associated with an ethics of forgiveness. In fact, Lerner (2012) recognized such misguided solutions in his book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A strategy to heal and transform the Middle East*.

Increasing numbers of people on all sides of this conflict are recognizing that “the peace process” and “negotiations” have little to do with achieving peace and much to do with political theatre aimed at creating the impression that some progress is being made. The “winner” in these negotiations is the side that escapes blame for the failure of the peace process. (p. 306)

By ignoring the basics of moral human relationships that, I believe, are rooted in ethics of forgiveness, peace negotiations based solely on signed treaties for political gain and expedience will not likely change the basic worldviews or belief systems of one side versus the other.

### **Challenge Two: Historical Trauma**

To further illustrate the issue of social and political challenges to forgiveness, I turn to the matter of historical trauma of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an example. McKnight (2004), Professor at the University of Alabama, wrote about historical trauma specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The problem of interpersonal strife and intercultural discord that pulls the human race away from universal recognition and maintenance of human rights manifests itself in many forms and under many guises. This legacy of past injustice on the

present state of culture in the region is indeed profound in memorial weight, emotional strife, and political dissonance. (McKnight, 2004, p. 141)

In other words, McKnight's reference to historical trauma infers how trauma is passed to subsequent generations, which perpetuates a cycle of violence among people, cultures and generations. However, McKnight (2004) offers hope of peaceful co-existence in spite of the presence of historical trauma through the desire for reconciliation, an "analysis of historical circumstances" (p. 147) with connections to the present, and a desire for a future different from the past.

To continue with historical trauma in context with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holocaust serves as an extreme situation of historical trauma that best serves my purpose in this discussion of a challenge to forgiveness. As such, while I do not negate occurrences of historical trauma within other countries and cultures, I choose to draw from those issues, with a specific view toward the Holocaust that both predate and surround the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because this conflict is the focal point of the study. As Jews, Israelis and especially those whose relatives were victims of the Holocaust, carry with them remnants of that historical trauma. At the same time, Palestinians have and continue to experience trauma due to the occupation of the West Bank that includes the Gaza Strip, where Palestinian residents are forced into inadequate living conditions such as inadequate housing and being allowed only intermittent access to electricity.

Given these conditions, however, I do make a distinction here between the events of the Holocaust and present-day tensions and violence in the Middle East, with such

distinctions potentially giving forgiveness a chance to impact new possibilities of repair between Israel and Palestine. For example, concerning the Holocaust, there is an overarching consensus regarding the immorality of the Nazi regime. In the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the issue of moral rightness is not so clear except to those who define the conflict solely in political views based on their cultural and national allegiances. In fact, and as will be revealed in excerpts and analyses of the personal narratives that I will present later in this study, opinions and views expressed by Israeli and Palestinian study subjects, did not take the view that there is a clearly defined right side or wrong side. Rather, they chose to see the conflict as a defect in human moral relations. Certainly, they acknowledged policies and political actions that have contributed to the conflict. However, again, the interviewees critiqued such policies as the products of human flaws in judgment and skewed worldviews. In the end, I believe that the lessons we learn, or refuse to learn, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are, and will continue to be, applicable to other domestic and international conflicts in which human beings continue to participate in ongoing incidents of violence towards one another without considering their shared humanity and their capacities for forgiveness. Regardless of the degree of immoral acts toward humans, the worldviews of those individuals and groups of people living in the midst of social and political conflict continue to be traumatized by historical events.

Supporting this point of view, McKnight (2004), addressed terrorist attacks linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We should, through our feelings of confusion and anger, acknowledge the desperation of these actions as a manifestation of an experienced and socially constructed aspect of a societal condition and as a potential facet of the human condition under circumstances of duress and within a particular historical-cultural context. (p. 142)

It is within these circumstances of duress that I see forgiveness as having a positive and reparative impact prior to an offense. If, as McKnight (2004) claims, incidents of terrorism are manifested as a result of societal conditions, I argue that practices of ethics of forgiveness can impress one's view of the other through a lens of human recognition that will resonate with all the feelings, frailties, desires, and needs that underscore our shared human condition. My point is that it is possible to change one's worldview about the other by challenging long-held, negative assumptions through an intentional practice of empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and love expressed as one's natural way of being and relating as an individual in a world among many others. On this view, I am suggesting that causation for violence and conflict against others can be minimized.

Secondly, when an act of wrongdoing does occur, holding a view of others through an ethical lens is more likely to minimize the desire for retribution. McKnight (2004) stated, "If peace is to be the end, the perceived need for revenge needs to yield to grief, solace, reparative justice and democratic compromise toward possible reconciliation, or at least political accommodation" (p. 143). The challenge here is in addressing emotions that have been tied so tightly to historical trauma by replacing these emotions with practices or behaviors that reflect beliefs in our common humanity. This capacity to reflect upon and act from an internalized ethics of forgiveness requires the ability to take a critical

look at ourselves with a self-awareness regarding how we want to live and sorting out whether or not our current lives are meeting those standards.

**Historical trauma: Memory and forgetting.** Through my research, I want to explore the impact of historical trauma experiences on one's ability to practice forgiveness. I include looking at remembering versus forgetting traumatic experiences, and how these might affect a practice of forgiveness. In later chapters of this dissertation, I present the issue of forgetting as an aspect of forgiveness that continues to be debated widely among philosophers who write on forgiveness. I also want to connect how forgetting may be embedded in personal definitions of forgiveness as experienced by those interviewed for this study. In turn, revisiting the example of my personal experience of witnessing the torture of the young boy when I myself was at that same age, the snapshot memory of this incident will most likely never be forgotten nor cease to cause certain emotions when it does replay. However, although that traumatic childhood memory may have contributed to my intense recoiling at the thought or vision of someone (or even animals) being hurt by others, the memory does not permeate my everyday interactions with others. I have not forgotten the incident, but through my own maturity and lived experiences, I have been able to adopt a worldview that allows me to see and experience the goodness and humanity in people, as well as maintain hope for repair of the world. I hope to find whether or not others have been able to adopt such a worldview following experiences of historical trauma through the interviews I conduct.

Historical trauma also raises the complexities of forgetfulness as it can stem from physiological or avoidance mechanism or, as an amnesic condition, forgetfulness can

serve as a human “safety valve” that lessens the initial impact of the traumatizing experience. On this point, I raise again the important role that ethics of forgiveness play in the process of forgetfulness in that these ethics create a more balanced view of the world, contributing to a sense of hopefulness that we can choose to practice and experience moral relationships with others as we might choose to forget (and forgive) past transgressions. Addressing “purposeful forgetfulness” (p. 151) in his description of a culmination of historical events targeting Jews, McKnight (2004) wrote, “. . . [these situations] are profoundly rooted in the volutions of history—volutions that can only be broken by rational criticality forgiveness, reparative action, and probably in some measure, purposeful forgetfulness” (p. 151).

### **Challenge Three: Forgiveness Viewed as Weakness**

To continue with challenges, I now introduce a third issue that I see as challenging the practice of forgiveness; that is, forgiveness viewed as a weakness. In addressing forgiveness as a perceived weakness, Lerner (2012) noted a view of weakness common among Israelis who speak of “*freier* . . . a pejorative word used by Israelis to describe people who are suckers, fools, easily taken advantage of, easily manipulated, or easily dominated” (p. 268). Forgiveness requires a vulnerability; an admission that one has done wrong against another, and asks for forgiveness. For some, being vulnerable may be interpreted as being weak or powerless, and, therefore, if forgiveness is perceived as a sign of weakness, it is not going to be a desirable practice. While not mentioning forgiveness directly, Lerner (2012) went on to address the shame that Jewish men felt at not being able to protect their families during the Holocaust. He also addressed the

broken trust that Jews experienced from their non-Jewish, European neighbors who directly or indirectly took part in the objectives of Nazi Germany. Given this history, can Israelis, as a particular group of people with a long history of trauma, be expected to allow the vulnerability, as an aspect of forgiveness, that can so easily lead to their destruction as a country and a culture?

**Weakness and perceptions of vulnerability.** In many cases, those groups, cultures or nations that have experienced historical trauma eventually take an oppressor ideology in order to avoid or counteract prior identifications with weakness and vulnerability. For example, terrorist groups often are comprised of individuals who have experienced oppression and ultimately choose violence as an expression of power. An example of this would be groups such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Black Panthers, the Irgun, an organization that developed in the early days of Israel's development as a nation, in which all chose violence to replace any perceptions of weakness or vulnerability. The experience of oppression can lead to a paranoid sense of vulnerability that causes suspicion of others' intent to destroy another. This line of thinking perpetuates competition and violence rather than a moral sense of cooperation and non-violent solutions to conflict.

The assumption that others are out to destroy us is nicely illustrated in McClintock's (1958) children's book titled *A Fly Went By*. The story begins with a young boy who sees a fly trying to get away from a frog. He confronts the frog who tells the boy that he, the frog, is being chased by a cat. In turn, the cat tells the boy that he is being chased by a dog, who then tells the boy that he is being chased by a fox. This story

progression continues with the fox being chased by a cow, who is being chased by a man with a gun, who is being chased by a lamb who has caught his hoof in a can. The reader learns that in trying to get free from the can, the lamb made a thumping noise that was perceived by the man to be a danger. The story points out how each of the characters assumed and perceived another with destructive intent. The moral or lesson underlying McClintock's fable is a simple, yet powerful one that can be correlated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with regard to assumptions and perceptions of weakness and vulnerability regarding self and the other. Here, I am suggesting that each side of the conflict perceives an ongoing chase for purposes of destruction of the other due to a self-perception of vulnerability to the other. Making additional parallels between the story and the real-world Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I look upon the boy's role as the voice of reason; in other words, as the voice of forgiveness that stops the chasing and exposes how intent and mistrust by the masses can be erroneously imagined or misconstrued. Certainly there is danger in the world, and the Israeli people know this more or as much as any others who have been victims of atrocities such as the Holocaust and years of oppressive treatment. However, views of the world can change, and it does mean taking a risk. Additionally, this story illustrates that of all those being chased, the human character is the only one who has the ability to reason, and yet carries a weapon.

To unravel an understanding of vulnerability and trust I offer this view: Vulnerability relies on trust, yet trust itself is vulnerable to human actions. I refer to this as a paradoxical understanding of risk-taking, which adds to the challenges for forgiveness and creates its own cycle of resistance. Philosopher Arendt (1958) saw



forgiveness as being that which can end this cycle. “But trespassing is an everyday occurrence . . . and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on” (p. 240). While retaliation and other oppressive acts based on paranoid vulnerability embrace the cycle of mistrust that results in destructive practices, Arendt (1958) advocated that practices of forgiveness can be reparative and can renew or imbue our relationships with moral value. Therefore, in order to take a risk and allow a sense of personal vulnerability, there needs to be something within us that makes the risk of trust worth taking. Our uniquely human desires for love and peace need to transcend our past experiences of trauma, thereby allowing our deepest desires for loving relationships to flourish. The ability to access our desires for love and inner peace is restorative in nature and includes a belief in the abilities of the self to enjoy that which humanity has to offer and repair that which has been hurtful. I am proposing that this is the role that forgiveness can play—serving as the catalyst for peaceful and loving existence internally and externally—if we can just capture it, understand it, and put forgiveness into practice.

It is my view that if one is to allow him or herself to become vulnerable, there must be a level of trust that no harm will befall the vulnerable person; or, relative to an act of wrongdoing, there is a belief that the wrongdoing can be repaired. In this thinking, trust of the other or trust of the self opens the individual to the world and all it has to offer in terms of building relationships with others. Also inherent to vulnerability is the issue of risk in terms of deciding the level of risk the individual or community is willing to take in gauging the community’s susceptibility to danger. This struggle suggests that there is a search for guarantees that no harm or hurt will result when we allow ourselves to become

vulnerable to others. Arendt (1958) wrote about vulnerability in similar contexts, naming it instead as “unpredictability” (p. 244) or describing it as the inability to keep promises made by the individual or the community.

The unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a twofold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the “darkness of the human heart,” that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act. (Arendt, 1958, p. 244)

In this conflict, forgiveness—understood and intended as a humanistic act—will need to come from within each side’s desire to live peacefully with neighbors, further reinforced by leadership that supports that desire. Illustrating this vision of forgiveness, the viewpoints shared by study participants in Chapter IV provide insight into how both Israelis and Palestinians embody the desire of people from both Israel and the occupied territory of Palestine to live peacefully with one another, along with their willingness to risk vulnerability through a practice of forgiveness.

Regarding my own struggles with forgiveness as discussed earlier in this chapter, I initially developed the understanding that forgiveness did nothing more than absolve the wrongdoer of responsibility for causing pain to another. By holding onto this notion of forgiveness, I erected a barrier to potential relationships that may have been loving and healing had I been more open and trusting. Refusal to allow myself to be vulnerable to life’s trespasses that Arendt (1958) described above also refuses to allow the intimate love and compassion that life also offers. As such, not forgiving has its consequences by

orienting the individual to embrace a worldview of paranoid vulnerability that assumes evil intent on the part of others.

#### **Challenge Four: Forgiveness as an Abstract Concept**

I will now identify the fourth most fundamental challenge to forgiveness, that being its abstract nature in terms of definition and conceptualization. Forgiveness has multiple meanings emanating from multiple perspectives—including social, theological, and philosophical perspectives—all of which depend on if, how, or why forgiveness is practiced. The idea of integrating abstract, theoretical notions of forgiveness into real-world practice, grounded in ethical human behaviors, produces a variety of emotions and reactions among people, many of which have been described within the contexts of the three previously discussed challenges to forgiveness. For instance, asking an Israeli or Palestinian citizen to make him or herself vulnerable to the other through forgiveness because it is the *moral* thing to do, will most likely not yield intended results. Rabbi Lerner (2012) emphasizes this point in his discussion of movements by groups that attempt to solve issues of conflict.

This awakened group is usually attacked as elitist, judgmental, and out of touch. . . . it is often the people who are most hurting who are also most angry at anyone who proposes a “solution”—particularly a solution that makes people feel momentarily uncomfortable with the way they have accommodated to their own situation and feelings of powerfulness. (Lerner, 2012, p. 350)

However, focusing on finding a common, universal definition will not create moral relations and social justice consciousness that is the true goal of forgiveness. That is, in order for forgiveness to lead to efforts of reconciliation, as this study hopes to find,

there needs to be concrete actions taken that will abolish oppressive practices and redirect power to promoting human equality rather than being used to create inequality. It is the promotion of equality that is at the heart of social justice consciousness. Without these changes, forgiveness continues to remain a nebulous concept unable to fulfill its true meaning.

These determinations lead me to the fifth and final challenge of forgiveness, which is the inextricable connection between forgiveness and the need to change the conditions that give rise to suffering and oppression.

#### **Challenge Five: Social and Political Injustice**

Lastly, the issue of social and political injustice stands as a real-world challenge to an understanding of forgiveness as a practical force with which to advance political change for social justice. I propose that this fifth challenge represents the most critical task facing forgiveness; that is, its practical application to ensure the elimination of socially and politically oppressive policies across societies and nations. With this vision in mind, forgiveness as a political force would be evidenced in the legislation and enactment of social and political policies intended to acknowledge that all people be treated with human dignity and respect through moral practices that inform social justice consciousness.

I am suggesting that challenge five is, in effect, a culmination of the four previously described challenges that address the development of moral relations among people. From a more simplistic perspective, the initial four challenges can be met through the creation of trusting relationships, understanding past trauma, self-empowering

attitudes allowing vulnerability to others, and engaging human capacities of forgiveness as a practice for personal and communal healing. I further posit that meeting these challenges in our personal lives creates a will for social justice that pushes on our leaders, thereby demanding the same level of moral conduct in those who are responsible for legislating the policies that underscore and infiltrate our social actions with each other. Therefore, I am asserting that forgiveness may be a driving force in the creation of social and political policies, both nationally and globally. While I am not suggesting that oppressive leaders who engage in violent practices will, through forgiveness, freely change their inhumane practices, I believe that a people's collective demands for social justice can be effective in advancing political change; and, with that change, avenues for practicing forgiveness can open and drive more change for the common good. A well-known example of such a collective social force is the Civil Rights movement that took place in the United States in the 1960s. Over time, and directly due to the non-violent protests and civil disobedience efforts exerted by Black activists and their supporters, legislation was eventually enacted that officially recognized the equality of all Americans regardless of their racial heritage. What role can we imagine that forgiveness played in the minds and hearts of those African Americans who moved forward, from dehumanization to humanization (in the eyes of society and the law) to participate in American life as full and equal citizens? Did forgiveness, whether experienced internally and/or expressed externally toward former oppressors, enable them to let go of past transgressions and any desires for retribution in order to embrace a more peaceful co-existence?

An example of an organization committed to political change in the interest of social justice, is the work of The Project for Integrating Spirituality, Law and Politics (PISLAP), an organization of activists representing the legal and social arenas. The following quote describes the organization's mission as presented on its website. I include it here because it acknowledges human capacities of forgiveness (without using the word forgiveness) that underscore some of the loftier attributes of our shared human condition as they can be applied to social and political interactions.

We believe that human beings long to live in a world in which people can fully recognize and affirm each other's humanity and that law can help bring that world into being through new legal processes that foster empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding. (PISLAP, n.d., "Our Mission," para. 1)

One of the organization's founding members, Peter Gabel (2015), wrote, "Our goal is to build a way of working through some problems as matters of moral justice embedded within an inherently moral universe and grounded in our common longing to fully recognize one another's humanity" (p. 22). The work of PISLAP, along with other organizations/groups involved in changing the political landscape through social justice practice, requires the efforts of people who recognize the factors that fuel human conflicts (a worldview of mistrust, historical trauma, viewing vulnerability and forgiveness as a weakness) and their readiness to confront such challenges with real actions grounded in moral purpose and a resolve to effect social justice at all levels of society—whenever and wherever possible. On this point, I want to reiterate that what Gabel has addressed as being "problems as matters of moral justice" can be understood as the challenges to forgiveness that I have proposed. Therefore, I am asserting that forgiveness is a practice

that not only addresses challenges to moral human relations, it is a process of applied action that can effect meaningful progress in the makeup and conduct of our social and political institutions. Essentially, the application of forgiveness can move the human condition beyond a state of mistrust, violence, and oppressive practices to the creation and implementation of legislation that human beings, societies, and nations treat one another with human dignity and equality. In Chapter V, I will explore the impact of forgiveness on political change as a specific area of focus throughout the interviews that I conducted for this study.

In summation, I have identified five areas of challenge to forgiveness: (a) the individual's or group's one-sided view of the world; (b) the debilitating, often dehumanizing, effects of historical trauma; (c) forgiveness viewed as a weakness that rebuffs the choice to become vulnerable; (d) forgiveness as an abstract concept that is difficult to define and, consequently, understand its practice; and (e) forgiveness as powerless to effect political change. Collectively, these five challenges to forgiveness make a case for avoiding its practice following wrongdoing. In light of its complexities, I have given forgiveness a monumental task in this study and feel the need to take a critical look at it with all its challenges and possibilities.

### **Defining Forgiveness**

Sorting out definitions of forgiveness helps to understand its challenges and problems in practice. The multiple meanings ascribed to forgiveness contribute to its complexities in terms of understanding or prescribing how forgiveness is/should be perceived and practiced. These complexities become apparent when posing the question,

“Have you forgiven?” to a person who has experienced some type of personal trauma. Responses are typically based on personal concepts of what forgiveness means to that person. In this way, forgiveness having a concrete definition will always allude us. However, the overarching challenge lies in promoting forgiveness when it cannot be specifically defined. Therefore, although there may not be one final definition of the word, the defining purpose of forgiveness as a human capacity of living may be what is most important in promoting moral relations and social justice consciousness. Although I will present definitions of forgiveness from various theoretical frameworks in Chapter II, it is important to briefly introduce a few here specifically to show the complexities among past and current scholarly theories of forgiveness. Following this theoretical introduction, I will discuss my framework of an ethics of forgiveness. As an introduction to the theoretical discussion in Chapter II, I will briefly address the theories of Griswold (2007), Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988), and Urban-Walker (2006).

### **Scholarly and Philosophical Definitions**

Within his definition of forgiveness, philosopher Griswold (2007) has provided justification for the expression of appropriate emotions following a wrongdoing and, at the same time, separating these emotions from retribution. “Forgiveness is a certain kind of ethical response to injury and the injurer” (Griswold, 2007, p. 39). His use of the term “ethical” releases the one injured from any self-flagellation for feeling justified anger, even including thinking about, but not acting in retribution. Viewing forgiveness as a virtue, Griswold (2007) supported this definition by citing forgiveness as forswearing resentment. “Forgiveness does however mean overcoming negative feelings that embody



and perpetuate the key features of resentment—such as contempt and scorn” (Griswold, 2007, p. 41). Similarly, Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) regarded resentment as an obstacle to intimate loving relationships that would need to be overcome in order to restore those relationships. “Forgiveness heals and restores; and, without it, resentment would remain as an obstacle to many human relationships we value” (Murphy, as cited in Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 17). Murphy’s definition certainly supports the consequences that I experienced by not forgiving. For both of these philosophers, definitions of forgiveness include overcoming resentment. However, there are caveats to this definition such as forgetting or letting go of resentment for purely selfish reasons (self-healing concerns that ignore or negate the need to repair moral relationships with others). Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) stated, “my ceasing to resent will not constitute forgiveness unless it is *done for a moral reason*” (p. 23). The philosophical theories of Griswold and Murphy add to the complexities of understanding forgiveness as a concretely definable concept in that not only should the practice of forgiveness replace feelings such as resentment, one should have “moral” reasons or intentions for forgiving. For those in the throes of trauma, are these moral considerations even humanly possible and, if so, is there a formula we need to follow? I hope to find answers to this question through the narratives of study participants that I will present in Chapter IV.

Given the positions of theorists Griswold (2007) and Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988), we are faced with two choices: (a) we can wait until our resentment dissipates before attempting to rebuild relationships, or (b) we can prioritize the importance of living with others in loving, trusting relationships above personal

resentment and feelings of retribution. The problem with the former choice is that as we are waiting, life continues to happen and our feelings of resentment contribute to our limited worldview and those involved in it. Moreover, our worldview is played out, consciously and unconsciously, in our everyday lives. With the latter choice, we will be free to experience loving, trusting relationships that override our experiences of wrongdoing. While a much more personally challenging option, I argue that it is the second choice that gives us strength to overcome painful situations that, in the Arendtian view, occur on a daily basis. Acting on this choice, based in loving and trusting intention, builds a foundation that restores trust in others and ourselves.

### **A Behavioral Approach to Defining Forgiveness**

Throughout this study, my working definition of forgiveness will entail behaviors rather than solely emotions that drive our behavior. This does not mean that I dismiss the importance of emotions as they are essential, yet complex, human responses to phenomena and situations that emerge in our daily lives, sometimes producing emotions that make us feel good and, other times, provoking negative feelings. These responses, or feelings, are vulnerable to uncertainty and change, unavoidable aspects of human existence, and they vary relative to those with whom we have relationships. It is because of these constant changes that I do not put forgiveness in the category of an emotion, but rather consider forgiveness as ethical behaviors that promote stable and consistent action towards others. Considered in this way, forgiveness may very well be a behavior that has the capability of changing emotions from a negative view of others to a more positive and humanistic view. This concept has been the focus of a great deal of psychological study.

However, for the purposes of my work, I have chosen to draw from research conducted by Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek (2007), professors of psychology at George Mason University, who study moral emotions and their relation to moral *behavior*. “When we sin, transgress or err, aversive feelings of shame, guilt or embarrassment are likely to ensue. When we ‘do the right thing,’ positive feelings of pride and self-approval are likely to result” (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 347). Therefore, if we choose forgiveness as a behavior grounded in a deliberate abandonment of retribution, which I would define as a moral act, then moral emotions may eventually follow. I am suggesting that these moral emotions include empathy, sympathy, and others that I have been identifying as ethics of forgiveness. On the topic of moral relations, Urban-Walker (2006), professor of philosophy at Marquette University and author of *Moral Repair*, wrote, “By ‘moral relationship’ in the generic sense I mean a certain disposition of people toward each other and the standards they trust, or at least hope, are shared” (p. 23). Urban-Walker (2006) wrote extensively on moral repair, which I will address in greater detail in Chapter II.

I am singling out ethics of forgiveness as human capacities and behavioral approaches that can easily be recognized, if not defined, in our interactions with others. They are qualities that contribute to the impact of forgiveness as a practice intended to repair and restore broken relationships. I also will show how these ethics of forgiveness contribute to the development of moral relationships *before* wrongdoing has occurred. As such, I am asserting my framework of ethics of forgiveness as my working definition of forgiveness.

### **Towards Ethics of Forgiveness**

Throughout this chapter, I have referred to ethics of forgiveness as those human capacities such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, love, and benevolence that anchor us to deeper existential realities concerning how we relate to others. I will provide a brief definition of each of these capacities within the context of developing moral relationships and a practice of forgiveness. As such, I use this framework of human capacities to serve as my working definition of forgiveness in that when they are expressed as human behaviors, they demonstrate forgiveness as a desirable and necessary construct of human experience.

Beginning with empathy, many theorists and philosophers contend that the human capacity to feel and express empathy is the basis of forgiveness. Bert Moore, dean of the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas, described empathy as “the focus on emotional responses to another’s distress (or joy) that has become the focus in most recent investigations” (Moore, 1990, p. 76). On this view, empathy requires the ability to understand the perspective of another, particularly with regard to the other’s feelings and concerns. Moore (1990) wrote, “Clearly acquiring the capacity to understand another’s viewpoint is an important (some would say essential) prerequisite for engaging in altruistic acts” (p. 77). Therefore, empathy—as an aspect of forgiveness—must include unselfish, humanistic viewpoints expressed or demonstrated toward the situation of the other as a key ingredient in performing altruistic acts. The quote from the *Torah* that I use at the beginning of this chapter addresses the connection between seeing the face of the other and truly seeing the other’s inherent humanity within

that view. Through the interviews, I hope to find if any of the participants had similar experiences upon seeing the face of someone they had considered to be an enemy.

Sympathy, which is closely related to empathy and is often used interchangeably with empathy, by both scholars and lay people, is used to convey the individual's ability to understand the emotions of another by specifically putting oneself in the other's shoes. At the same time, some theorists posit that definitions of sympathy and empathy need to be distinguished as separate rather than use the terms interchangeably. For example, Lauren Wispé (1987), an author who has written extensively on empathy and sympathy, made the following distinction between the two terms.

In sympathy the sympathizer is “moved by” the other person. In empathy the empathizer “reaches out” for the other person . . . To know what it would be like if *I* were the other person is empathy. To know what it would be like to *be* that other person is sympathy. (p. 318)

For purposes of this study, the distinction between empathy and sympathy is less important than the role that each plays as a particular ethic of forgiveness. Ultimately, both terms represent capacities that strengthen human bonds between self and others. Directly connecting these two concepts through his writing on the philosophy of forgiveness, Griswold (2007) has determined that “‘Sympathy’ is often used synonymously with ‘compassion,’ that is, fellow feeling with the sorrow of others. The essential point is that the spectator enters into the situation of the other and experiences *concern* for the other” (p. 89). Building on Griswold's statement, I suggest that sympathy can then be understood as the ability to see the other as a fellow human being, infused with qualities and feelings common to all human existents in the world. Empathy may be

understood as the ability to imagine oneself in the shoes of another specific to the other's situation. In my view, regardless of their nuanced differences in meaning, both terms are best understood as essential to informing how each of us, as individuals, see and treat the other.

Lastly, I combine benevolence, compassion, and love as ethics of forgiveness within the same section using a shared definition because, as closely aligned behaviors, expressions of benevolence, compassion, and love produce common effects when we choose to treat others from this ethical standpoint. North (1987) emphasized taking action or behaving from an ethics of love, affection, and trust, identifying this process as a "change of heart" (p. 506) that replaces feelings of resentment with those of "compassion and affection" (p. 506).

If we are to forgive, our resentment is to be overcome not by denying ourselves a right to that resentment, but by endeavouring to view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence and love while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them. (North, 1987, p. 502)

North (1987) further stated that in order to forgive, a risk must be taken in the belief or hope that trust and affection will be honored. What I find significant in North's concept of forgivingness is the extension of caring ethics of forgiveness to the one, the wrongdoer, who has ostensibly abandoned his or her right to compassion, benevolence, and love by having chosen unethical action him/herself. On this point, is it possible to envision a person undeserving of basic human consideration regardless of the depth of his or her destructive actions? How can we possibly forgive someone who is regarded (by the

injured, or by the courts, or by society as a whole) as no longer worthy of these basic human needs?

It is this depth of understanding that I have designed my study to explore, examining theoretical conceptions of forgiveness framed by scholars and philosophers and analyzing the narratives of my interviewees in which their lived experiences of injury and forgiveness might come to light.

### **Forgiveness and Social Justice Consciousness**

With this study, my intent is to situate forgiveness as a moral foundation of existence grounded in human ethics and a social justice consciousness that acknowledges the worth of all human beings. Framing my conception of forgiveness in this way—as a standard of ethical thought and practice—necessarily involves a social justice awareness and vision that crosses multiple levels, from the classroom to the local community, to the world in which we are increasingly connected. I will provide both a broader and deeper explanation of what I mean by social justice consciousness in Chapter II, where I analyze the connections between practices of forgiveness and the social good in my examination of the literature.

Miller (1999) has written extensively on social justice, most notably in his book, *Principles of Social Justice*. Miller's work stresses the importance of social justice as an idea that continually changes our systems and practices in the name of fairness.

Justice is a social virtue—it tells us how to order our relationships, what we must rightly do for one another—and so our hope must be that we can all agree about what justice demands of us, that everyone can feel that his or her legitimate claims have been met. (Miller, 1999, p. 21)

Moreover, Miller (1999) emphasized his view that dignity and respect must be required in a socially-equal society, stating, “. . . if we want our society to have some degree of solidarity, the only feasible basis is for people to be linked together horizontally as equals” (p. 241). Creating solidarity by people becoming active members of a political community that regulates policies and practices is one way that social justice practices are driven. We see examples of community action today through the collective appeals for equal voting rights and equal distribution of education resources. Miller describes polarization in equating justice with equality especially in social and political discussions and policy-making and explores how this polarization hinders a single concept of a socially-equal society.

I define social justice consciousness as an acute awareness of others as human beings who share in my condition of being human. In this way, the individual is predisposed to consider the other as a likeness of him or herself, remaining conscious of the fact that all human beings share similar needs as well as a mutual desire to be treated with dignity and respect. I support Miller’s (1999) humanitarian principle in which he asserted, “If our humanitarian obligation is to relieve suffering or deprivation, we should relieve as much suffering or deprivation as possible with the resources at our disposal” (p. 223). Given this principle of humanitarian obligation, I propose that the capacities of forgiveness that I frame as ethics of forgiveness, demonstrated in their aligned behaviors, must play a pivotal role in our treatment of others if our intent is to promote human dignity and respect for all. The connection between forgiveness and social justice consciousness becomes increasingly clear when we actually witness or experience the



ways in which practices of forgiveness foster ethical and moral relations between people, communities, and nations.

### **Creating a Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

One of the concluding pieces of this study addresses my fourth research question: Can forgiveness be taught? Having established the role of forgiveness as repairing, developing, and sustaining moral relations regardless of whether or not a wrong has been done, I propose that a practice of forgiveness, grounded in established, ethical behaviors, has strong implications for pedagogy. Supporting this proposition are the narratives of many of my interviewees who also hold beliefs that forgiveness can and should be taught.

In my view, the greatest challenge to teaching forgiveness is the abstract nature of the term forgiveness itself. In other words, forgiveness is not a concrete or measurable concept wedded to a standard definition prior to its implementation. Moreover, our current educational system's policies and practices—designed around standardized goals, objectives, measurements, and right versus wrong answers—will no doubt find the topic of forgiveness difficult to capture. Nonetheless, I am suggesting that by teaching and modeling ethics of forgiveness, behaviors of forgiveness can be learned by students in the pedagogical setting and implemented in their daily lives. In this way, moral relations can be addressed as ethical human relations within educational settings and, with that, levels of social justice consciousness can be raised among all school stakeholders.

Teaching a topic that is void of a standard definition confronts the challenges that the current educational system will find. The paradox attendant to addressing forgiveness within pedagogical constructs is that the same system—the American educational

system—that has inflicted moral injury upon many students (including myself), would be challenged to become a systematic catalyst for ameliorating moral injury through practices of forgiveness. In this regard, I refer to Freire’s (1970) denunciation of the “banking system” (p. 71) of education that he defined as a method of “depositing” prescribed information from the teacher to the students. This standard of teaching causes an impasse to human communication, thereby negating the relational aspect of teaching and learning that is so necessary to human education, in general, and to practices of ethics of forgiveness, specifically.

Teaching forgiveness needs to be more than a part of a structured curriculum. Forgivingness and its ongoing behaviors need to be understood and internalized as a framework for living, guiding how we interact with others. Roberts (1995) wrote about forgivingness in relation to a community of self and others.

I speak of a ‘vision’ of the other as in this community with oneself, or the “sense” that these offenders, ought not to be one’s enemies, because this is not just a *belief* of the forgiving person, but a basic form of a vision of himself and other human beings. (Roberts, 1995, p. 294)

Roberts’s (1995) statement reinforces the need to view others as humans with feelings and desires similar to our own. It is this view that embodies the specific human capacities of empathy and sympathy that can be taught and practiced in all aspects of our daily lives, including the educational setting. As trusted role models and mentors in our lives, school teachers and other kinds of educators have the power to impact the various ways in which we (as children, youth, and adults) relate to one another. I have dedicated Chapter VI to

understanding and creating a pedagogy of forgiveness and I will provide a substantive discussion that will address its implications and challenges.

### **Chapter Summary**

To conclude this introduction to my dissertation study, I isolate three primary aims:

1. To situate forgiveness as a behavior that promotes moral relations and social justice consciousness among individuals, communities, and nations.
2. To provide a research framework that encompasses theoretical and philosophical concepts of forgiveness, along with practical applications of forgiveness as illustrated through first-hand interviews intended to illustrate the various ways in which people (Israelis and Palestinians) understand and express forgiveness in their daily lives.
3. To frame forgiveness as a construct of ethical human capacities that can be practiced regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred.

The dual features of theory and practice that inform perceptions of forgiveness are necessary to creating a general understanding that forgiveness does not neatly fit into one specific definition or one set of practices. Typically, interpretations of forgiveness are often personal depending upon how the individual conceives of and chooses to practice the act of forgiving.

### **Chapter Outline**

This study, *Towards a Pedagogy of Forgiveness: Lessons from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, is comprised of seven chapters. My overarching goal is to explore

forgiveness as a holistic concept from theoretical, social, spiritual and practical perspectives that, when integrated, provide an understanding of forgiveness as a chosen practice of ethical behaviors between human beings in their roles as individuals, as members of society, and as leaders of nations. At the same time, I incorporate a practical approach to understanding forgiveness through a qualitative interview research process that addresses the lived experiences of individuals impacted by historical conflict and trauma, seeking to uncover conceptions of forgiveness that might speak to a collective desire for moral repair in human relationships and a belief in the importance of social justice consciousness. I now follow with a chapter outline mapping the progression of this study:

Chapter I, “An Introduction to Forgiveness,” presents my purpose and rationale for studying the topic of forgiveness, further explaining my choice of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the contextual framework for this work. I began with a personal narrative as prologue because, in my view, understanding my subjective frame of reference with respect to experiences of wrongdoing is a necessary consideration in understanding my choice of forgiveness as study topic and the ways in which I have conducted this research. In this chapter, I also address the research questions that guide the theoretical and empirical features driving my exploration of forgiveness as the study problem. Further, I present what I consider challenges to forgiveness in order to provide a balanced and complete picture of both the possibilities and the barriers that underscore a practice of forgiveness.

In Chapter II, “Framing the Study: Theoretical Understandings,” I highlight the research of scholars and theorists who pose both similar and contrasting perceptions and definitions of forgiveness in their work. By examining the various theories presented in the literature, I aim to demonstrate the complexities involved in narrowing a definition of forgiveness and still encompass its abstract nature. As such, I discuss theoretical concepts correlating to the challenges of forgiveness (addressed in Chapter I) while providing an understanding of a historically developed concept of forgiveness.

Chapter III, “Methods of Study,” provides a detailed explanation of my study methodology and design that will include the number of participants, interview venue, length of each interview, and the process by which participants were approached. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological foundations grounded in theoretical and philosophical research that conveys the justification of this methodology within my study. I include, in Appendix A, the format used in coding the interviews. In turn, I address limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

In Chapter IV, “Speaking about Forgiveness in Relation to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” I provide the content that sits at the heart of my study. Here, I address how I have collected and analyzed narrative data resulting from interviews with selected individuals who have been personally impacted by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through my interview questions, I seek to uncover first-hand perceptions of forgiveness as a concept and as a behavioral practice. Further, I analyze and discuss the themes that emerge from these compelling interviews.

Chapter V, “The Story,” provides my analyses and reflections on the study findings from Chapter IV. I discuss in detail each interviewee’s words on forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness as concepts relevant to their living situation and active participation in efforts to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. I also weave the study’s theoretical writings that have been introduced in order to provide a comparative of alignments and areas of disagreements.

Chapter VI, “Pedagogy of Forgiveness,” explores the possibility of whether or not forgiveness can be taught. More specifically, I address the challenges posed by the current, educational system as it is structured and implemented in the U.S.; how this system—grounded in standardization, assessment, and measurement—leaves little, if any room, for inclusion of a pedagogy of forgiveness in which personhood and human capacities of empathy, sympathy and other ethics of forgiveness would need to be emphasized. Essentially, I present a pedagogy of forgiveness as an educational framework through which students can become better critical thinkers, communicators, problem solvers, and socially conscious citizens.

In Chapter VII, “Conclusion,” I pull together theoretical concepts of forgiveness, challenges to forgiveness, practices of forgiveness, and the insights culled from my interviews with Israeli-Palestinian study participants to arrive at the following conclusion: Forgiveness, understood as a human choice expressed in intentional and ethical behaviors—can have a profound impact on the development of moral human relationships and social justice consciousness, regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. I will argue that a practice of forgiveness, enacted as a purposeful way of

relating to each other with moral intent, creates relationships of dignity and respect for all humans. Ultimately, I emphasize that forgiveness should be understood as a behavior, rather than an emotional response, that contributes to healing those pains and fears that often drive acts of violence and retaliation.

Also, in Chapter VII, I include key points from my trip to the Middle East that occurred as this study was being developed. I share conditions resulting from the oppressive practices of Israel's occupation of Palestine that I witnessed while touring the occupied Palestinian territories. Including these experiences provides additional testimony relevant to the consequences of the conflict.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **FRAMING THE STUDY: THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

In keeping with the problem posed in this study, exploring forgiveness as a personal, communal, and institutional human behavior as opposed to an emotional response, the purpose of this chapter is to take a critical look at the theoretical, philosophical, and religious histories that address forgiveness within the problem-posed framework. I begin with discussion of the historical roots of forgiveness in order to discern where concepts of forgiveness may have originated. Most people generate their own understanding of forgiveness in their day-to-day interactions with others and their involvement with organizations such as religious affiliates. I include the work of Griswold (2007), Murphy and Hampton (1988), and Sadler (2009) that will provide historical context to the origins of forgiveness and insight into causal factors that warrant forgiveness. As religion is embedded in the Western world culture, I will explore a faith-centered concept of forgiveness, focusing on Christianity and Judaism. It is safe to say that most world religions address forgiveness within religious tenets; however, Christianity holds prevalence in forming cultural practices in the U.S. and Judaism's influence is most prevalent in the Israeli-Palestinian region. I want to make the distinction here between practice and belief to suggest that one's religious belief is not necessarily practiced in secular life. I use the work of Lerner (2003), Newman (2013), Wiesenthal



(1995), Arendt (1958), Lauritzen (1987), Urban-Walker (2006, 2007), and Lévinas (1985) to demonstrate the role of forgiveness in religious and philosophical thought and teachings.

In the next part of my literature review, I include work by writers who address forgiveness as a behavior through practices of ethics of forgiveness—empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and love. These scholars include Hoffman (1981), Moore (1990), Notivz (1998), Darwall (1998), Eisikovits (2004), Shapiro (2006), Nussbaum (2003), Prager and Solomon (1995), and hooks (2000). I will include behaviors such as vulnerability and trust as principles of forgiveness as outlined by Misztal (2011) and the challenges to these behaviors as addressed by Mauss et al. (2007) and Halperin et al. (2013), especially in populations that have experienced trauma in historical and current living situations.

Next, I will make a connection between forgiveness and social justice consciousness by bringing in definitions of social justice concepts as outlined by Miller (1999), Young (2006), Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, and Kluwer (2003), and Douzinas (2013). I make attempts to weave together concepts of justice with a common understanding of moral human consideration for the other.

Finally, I address my research question of whether or not forgiveness can be taught by introducing the concept of a pedagogy of forgiveness drawing from the writings of Freire (1970), Purpel (1989), McKnight (2004), Osterman (2000), Hursh (2007), Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, and Greytak (2013), Apple (2001), Biesta (2012), Daniel et al. (2014), Prilleltensky (2014), Valeeva and Demakova (2015), Pritchard Paolitto (1977), Weissbourd, Jones, Anderson, Kahn, and Russell (2014), Britzman (2009), and

Stetsenko and Arievidt (2002). Collectively, this review of the literature will provide the grounding for a conceptual framework for this study to explore moral dimensions of forgiveness as related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Philosophical and Religious Histories of Forgiveness**

Roots of forgiveness are embedded in philosophical and religious histories that have formative influence on its present-day concept and practice. Tracing these roots may be helpful in our ability to understand and consider how forgiveness can be modeled and practiced as building blocks for developing moral and ethical attitudes and behaviors, not simply as a set of apologetic strategies or emotional responses. Understanding its original purpose and use provides an awareness of how and why people hold certain concepts of forgiveness and how they practice or withhold it. Additionally, understanding historical concepts creates a foundation with which to apply the best of what forgiveness intends in order to put into practice those behaviors that create moral relationships and social justice consciousness.

### **Historical Notions of Forgiveness**

Philosopher and author of *Forgiveness, A Philosophical Exploration*, Griswold (2007) explores forgiveness in “both its interpersonal and political dimensions” (p. xiv), both of which are key elements of this study. Griswold’s work explores forgiveness as it relates to resentment and retribution especially between two people, and more broadly, in a political context such as in truth and reconciliation commissions and political apology. Griswold (2007) poses this dichotomy for forgiveness:

how can one accept fully that moral evil has been done and yet see its perpetrator in a way that counts as “reconciliation” in a sense that simultaneously forswears revenge, aspires to give up resentment, and incorporates the injury suffered into a narrative of self that allows the victim and even the offender to flourish? (p. xxv)

This challenge is especially important with regard to the role that forgiveness plays in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This quote above made by Griswold (2007) addresses a major challenge to forgiveness—the dilemma of acknowledging and forgiving a moral evil that has been perpetrated. This is also the dilemma that I argue forgiveness rescues—seeing the humanity in all persons regardless of deed. Recognition of the human face adds to the vocabulary of forgiveness. This does not mean to imply that wrongdoers should not be held accountable for their actions, nor is it inappropriate for the victim to feel resentment and anger. However, recognition of each other’s humanness moves us towards moral repair of broken relationships.

**Anger, resentment, and desires for retaliation.** Feelings and emotions that one experiences following a wrongdoing, present a dilemma as to whether or not forgiveness is personally attainable. This dilemma is at the heart of the struggle to heal from victimization due to wrongdoings by others. To specifically address resentment and retaliation, ancient pagan notions of forgiveness were being recognized in writings such as those by Aristotle who addressed aspects of forgiveness as related to anger. “Although other emotions Aristotle discusses . . . anger remains arguably the most essential connected emotion. Certainly in Aristotle’s texts, it is the only emotion *explicitly* connected, albeit all too briefly, to forgiveness” (Sadler, 2009, p. 236). Throughout this review of works by various theorists and philosophers, although anger is central, it is not

the sole issue that challenges forgiveness. What is debated, however, is whether or not forgiveness requires *eliminating* anger and resentment at the wrongdoing or having the ability to repair or reconcile moral relations *in spite of* having these negative emotions. Griswold's (2007) interpretation of Aristotle's view on this subject includes, "An excess of forgiveness would amount to excusing injury too readily . . . A defect of forgiveness would amount to withholding forgiveness when it is due" (p. 18). Griswold (2007) emphasizes this interpretation further through writing, "Aristotle tells us that to fail to be angry when the occasion rightly demands it is to be 'slavish', that is to manifest the view that one does not think oneself worth defending" (Griswold, 2007, p. 43). Tied into this notion of self-respect, I see a paradox of forgiveness in that there needs to be some level of anger at a wrongdoing in order for forgiveness to even be possible, and at the same time, it is anger and resentment that drives retributive behaviors as opposed to forgiving behaviors. The problem here is to determine the difference between excess and defect, which contributes to the abstract nature of forgiveness which I suggested in Chapter I. Further, I suggest that this nebulous concept easily addresses four of the five challenges I have established, specifically with how one views the world, one's experiences of historical trauma and whether or not one considers forgiveness as a weakness in character. How one defines each of these states for him or herself may very well impact where one determines if forgiveness is warranted. Additionally, results of wrongdoing are deeply rooted in emotions that may drive responses and behaviors that include retaliation. Arguably, the point here is not to dismiss the impact of experiences, but to demonstrate

how forgiveness may change a long-held view due to those experiences, thereby providing relief and healing from embedded and deep-held anger and resentment.

To continue with feelings of resentment is its close relationship to revenge or retaliation, which drives retributive acts of violence with expressed justification. Confronting the need to separate resentment from revenge is a “task confronting forgiveness” (Griswold, 2007, p. 29) that proves the futility of retaliation on the wrongdoer mainly by convincingly demonstrating that retaliation will not change the past. Griswold (2007) wrote, “Forgiveness accepts that the past is unchangeable, but asserts that our responses to it are not (and these include our decisions about the future)” (p. 29). In other words, forgiveness is what helps us move forward to healing and restoring lives in which moral relations are again possible.

Similar to Griswold’s writings on forgiveness as forswearing retaliation and revenge, is the work of Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). As Griswold (2007) references Aristotle in tracing roots of forgiveness, Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) references Bishop Joseph Butler in doing the same. The similarities are seen in Murphy’s interpretation of Butler’s teachings that resentment also has its excesses and defects as Griswold (2007) mentions above, and resentment actually “reinforces the rules of morality” (p. 15); however, excesses of resentment must be overcome. Murphy sees consequences of excesses of resentment and withholding of forgiveness as interfering with positive human relations that we all want. He wrote: “The person who cannot forgive is the person who cannot have friends or lovers” (p. 17). To address the ability to move beyond resentment, Murphy (1988) offers five reasons that justify forgiveness.

They include: the wrongdoer having a change in heart (or behavior); the wrongdoer's motives were good; the wrongdoer has suffered enough; the wrongdoer admits to humiliation; the wrongdoer's behavior is not typical of his past behavior. This checklist seems to be Murphy's (1988) way of distinguishing between the excess and defect of forgiveness, and, therefore, to determine its appropriateness. As well, these justifications preserve self-respect on the part of the victim by justifying the act itself, which is totally the responsibility of the wrongdoer. What this process does not address is who is liberated by these justifications, and obviously it seems to be the wrongdoer and not the victim, unless resentment is truly overcome. In this case, however, the issue of self-respect re-emerges for the victim in that forgiveness may be justified. However, the emotional response of resentment may still be present. What may result is that revenge or retaliation is avoided and this just may be enough for parties—the wrongdoer and the victim—to heal regardless if a reconciliation of a relationship with each other occurs.

Hampton took a different position on retributive punishment following a wrongdoing (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). She cited the example of a bully who asserts his superiority by beating up other children. This victimization, she claimed, is a declaration "that he [the bully] is elevated with respect to me" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 125), and that this act is a false claim of "moral reality" (p. 125). She wrote, "If I cause the wrongdoer to suffer in proportion to my suffering at his hands, his elevation over me is denied, and moral reality is reaffirmed" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 125). This scenario seems to mirror an eye for an eye concept of justice. One may argue, then, that this case of retributive justice is also an act of self-respect in that the victim is able to

take back his or her power as a human deserving of moral treatment. The problem with this behavior of retributive justice lies in how to determine where retribution stops and what can prevent it. It is here that I maintain forgiveness plays a role in stopping retributive behavior without a loss of self-respect. Hampton warned of the danger of retributive behavior, “So the retributivist who is committed to reasserting moral truth must be aware that her way of reasserting it does not implicitly deny for the criminal what it seeks to establish for the victim” (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 137). In other words, the debate comes down to whether or not we wish to “strike a blow for morality” (p. 137). Possibly, forgiveness here plays a role not so much in forswearing resentment, but ensuring that justice is carried out with morally human consideration for the wrongdoer.

To round out this discussion of historical notions of forgiveness as addressed in the literature, I will next address various challenges to conventionally embedded understandings of forgiveness as they have been shaped by culture and society.

### **Challenges to Historical Notions of Forgiveness**

Through historical exploration of what forgiveness is, I address notions of what forgiveness *is not*, thereby creating a paradoxical notion of definition. In other words, eliminating how something is defined also contributes to its definition. One such notion includes knowing the intent of the offender. Sadler (2009) wrote,

The notion that one should forgive a vicious person is alien to Aristotle not only because he *does not* recognize forgiveness’s full value and possibilities, but also because he *does* recognize the values involved in and protected by bringing action, or at least words of blame, against those doing wrong. (p. 235)

This interpretation of Aristotle's notion of forgiveness suggests that there are those who are not worthy of forgiveness due to the viciousness of their acts, making the depth of the wrongdoing a condition, or a situation where forgiveness is not a valid response. Putting conditions of forgiveness such as these (intent of the wrongdoer and depth of the wrongdoing) places categories of conditions upon resolution of conflict, i.e. worthiness of forgiveness. These conditions are what one may consider as boundaries surrounding justification for forgiveness. Other conditions to consider are based on mercy and justice that may be granted following a wrongdoing that remove the act of forgiveness from the hands of the victim. Justice, which may be demanded following a wrongdoing as determined by laws and governing court systems, impose punishment for an offense, either against a person or other entity. In this sense, retribution is determined by other than the victim, such as a jury of peers determining the guilt or innocence of the wrongdoer. The condition for resolution, therefore, is dependent upon a verdict that the victim would desire. Similarly, another act following a wrongdoing that may impede the act of forgiveness is mercy. Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) wrote, "mercy may be seen as "treating that person less harshly than, in the absence of the mercy, one would have treated him" (p. 167), due to humanitarian or moral reasoning such as a wrongdoer not being responsible for his crime due to a mental deficiency. With imposed punishment—justice and/or mercy—being granted as a result of a wrongdoing, retribution by the victim has most often been avoided. Following this thinking, acts of justice and mercy then would meet the definition of forgiveness as forswearing retribution since retribution by the victim has been avoided. However, has one been



granted forgiveness if granted mercy? As Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) stated in discerning the difference between justice and mercy, “If, on the other hand, mercy is totally separate from justice and actually requires (or permits) that justice sometimes be set aside, it then counsels injustice” (p. 169). Although I do not intend to debate the place that mercy and justice hold as an answer to a wrongdoing, I do suggest here that both contribute to the problems and challenges associated with the practice of forgiveness that is one of my research questions as outlined in Chapter I. If historical definitions of forgiveness include forswearing of retribution by the victim, then acts of justice and mercy fit into that definition, however, these acts may have little to do with one’s ability to forgive even though a form of justice has been declared. In fact, if a level of justice is not levied on a wrongdoer that the victim determines is just, a greater need for retribution may result. Situations such as these emphasize the complexity of forgiveness and contribute to a nebulous concept that is based upon responses that it is meant to overcome—anger, resentment and acts of retribution. My inclusion of the concepts of justice and mercy address the political dimensions that Griswold (2007) explores in his work, as mentioned earlier, based on the fact that justice and mercy are most times determined through local, state and federal laws. In contrast to justice and mercy, I will introduce in subsequent chapters the concept of ethics of forgiveness and suggest that, as human emotions, they align more closely with forgiveness as acts of personal healing, than practices of justice or mercy by legally-imposed practices.

Having addressed historical notions of forgiveness, I move to religious roots that contribute to current understandings and practices of forgiveness.

## Conceptions of Forgiveness in Religious Thought

Continuing with an exploration of roots of forgiveness, I explore religious contributions to cultural phenomena of beliefs and practices that are embedded in edicts of moral and ethical behaviors among humans. In many theoretical and philosophical constructs of forgiveness, reference is made to religious doctrine, especially those of the Judeo-Christian belief, when describing the roots and commands to forgive. In this section I will provide brief understandings of the views of forgiveness from the Jewish and Christian perspective to convey how religious teachings inform forgiveness ideology and guidance for its practices.

In Judaism, the duty to forgive continues to be at the heart of scripture from the *Torah* (Jewish Written Law), Mishnah (Rabbinic clarification of commandments from the *Torah*), and the Talmud (legal commentary on the *Torah*). Of similar importance is the Midrash, which is a compilation of sermons and teachings on Rabbinic literature. I include the Midrash here because of its root meaning to educate, examine, and learn; concepts, among other such human imperatives, that encourage us to explore their relevance to our lives as human beings necessarily connected to and impacted by one another. On this point, I connect the principles contained in the Midrash with forgiveness, suggesting that forgiveness also warrants a positioning in educational processes and self-examination practices that can better inform our collective ability to live morally fashioned lives in our communal world. Practices in Judaism encourage education and exploration of laws and traditions within a framework of consideration for the Other. For example, *Tikkun Olam*, or repair of the world, is a Jewish translation of scripture that

reinforces the individual's moral responsibility to connect with others and to do good works, all for the purpose of making the world a better place in which to live and flourish. As such, Judaism does not isolate the individual as a singular agent, but views the individual as an integral and responsible member of the greater community. Forgiveness, although referred to as a "duty," is situated within the duty each one has to improve one's moral character and to be a responsible member of one's community. In other words, duty may be looked upon here as a moral duty rather than a duty that takes on a dogmatic and punitive consequence. In this sense, forgiveness may be seen as a duty to view the offender as a human being who is a person of moral character and, therefore, as a member of the moral community. To further this concept of forgiveness, Lerner (2003), author of *Healing Israel/Palestine: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation* wrote, "The Talmud was very wise when it cautioned, 'Don't judge your fellow till you stand in his place'" (p. 177). In this statement, we see a testament to empathy, one of the ethics of forgiveness that will be addressed in detail in this study.

Judaism's emphasis on forgiveness is further stressed through the work of Newman (2013), Professor of Religious Studies and Associate Dean of the College and Director of Advising at Carleton College in Minnesota. Newman wrote extensively on Judaism and situated forgiveness in this way: "First, it seems clear to me that forgiveness as a moral gesture is *other regarding*" (Newman, 2013, p. 436). He went on to expand on this meaning by writing about the role of forgiveness: to "benefit the offender" (p. 436), showing compassion, but also as an obligation of the offended to forgive. He focused his interpretation of Jewish concepts of forgiveness on views stemming from Jewish law.

These laws include the equal obligations of the offender to ask for forgiveness and of the offended who is obligated to forgive. These obligations, according to interpretations of Jewish law, places responsibility on both parties to close what Newman (2013) referred to as a “moral gap” (p. 439) that needs repair. The premise of which Newman bases this view of forgiveness from a Jewish perspective, is shown in his writing, “to be forgiving, then is nothing less than to reflect and extend God’s own forgiving nature in our relationships with others” (p. 444). On High Holy days, Jews ask G-d for forgiveness and mercy, drawing each one closer to G-d, embracing his compassion for all human beings. It is this drawing to be closer to G-d that can be interpreted as the obligatory duty of one’s Jewish practice. In other words, it is each one’s desired relationship with G-d that determines what obligations and/or duties are practiced. In this way, relationships with others may be seen as a reflection on one’s relationship with G-d through examination of Jewish doctrine.

I further point out the complexities of an understanding of forgiveness through the experiential narrative by Wiesel (1995) that focuses on his confrontation with forgiveness as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. Wiesel recounted, through his book, *The Sunflower*, his being taken to the bedside of an SS German soldier who lay dying. The soldier requested that a Jew grant him forgiveness before his death for the crimes the soldier committed during the war. Wiesel did not grant forgiveness, which put him in a moral dilemma he described by writing, “This is a profound moral question that challenges the conscience of the reader of this episode, just as much as it once challenged my heart and my mind” (1995, p. 97). It is also important to note here that

neither did Wiesenthal take revenge on the soldier, which, as written in the *Torah*, it is explicitly forbidden to take revenge or bear grudges (Leviticus 19:18). In the final pages of *The Sunflower*, Wiesenthal (1995) posed the question to 53 men and women, asking their views on whether or not each one would have forgiven the Nazi soldier. His question mirrors his dilemma of whether or not he should have forgiven the officer versus his correctness in not doing so. The recorded answers vary in explanations for why he was correct in not forgiving the dying officer or why he should have granted forgiveness. This ambiguity directly addresses the challenge to forgiveness as an abstract concept that is personal in nature. Further, although Jewish law provides guidance on the moral expectations towards others, experienced horrors such as the Holocaust (historical trauma) put living according to Jewish doctrine in challenging positions. It is here that I refer to my earlier inclusion of Griswold's (2007) question asking how one can realize that evil has been done and at the same time reconcile with the evildoer. This task confronting forgiveness is needed more than ever if we are to build and sustain moral interactions, repair wrongdoings, and create social justice consciousness.

To continue with a Christian viewpoint of forgiveness, possibly the most common reference to forgiveness in the Christian teachings are the words uttered by Jesus of Nazareth as he was nailed to a cross and asks G-d to forgive those who were about to put him to death. From this historical account philosopher Arendt (1958) attributes the discovery of forgiveness to Jesus, although several philosophers, Griswold (2007) being one, have disagreed with this premise and argued that writings on forgiveness can be found in pre-Christian literature. Taking scripture passages from the New Testament,

Arendt (1958) posits that Jesus taught of forgiveness as a “freedom from vengeance” (p. 241) writing that not only can G-d grant forgiveness, but forgiveness “must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also” (p. 239).

For some, Christianity relates forgiveness to the likeness of G-d. Lauritzen (1987), Professor of Religious Ethics at John Carroll University in Ohio, highlights this notion as he wrote on forgiveness from a Christian perspective, “In the context of Christian belief, forgiveness is inextricably tied to beliefs about God . . .” (p. 151). This statement is similar to that in Judaism that links the human connection directly to one’s relationship with G-d. However, there is a difference here in that in Christian belief, according to Lauritzen, the sinner ultimately must answer to G-d, thereby the offended’s need for condemnation is lessened. Questioned here is whether this belief could be interpreted as absolving human responsibility for acceptance of others’ differences, especially when those differences are believed to be of an immoral nature. Lauritzen (1987) similarly questions this view, “The point I want to make, then, is that in the context of a commitment to certain religious beliefs, the quality of forgiveness may be changed” (p. 12). As Lauritzen (1987) also puts it, “hate the sin, love the sinner” (p. 151) may be a way of turning over to G-d the responsibility of response that would appear to some to be the responsibility of the wrongdoer. Further, it should be noted that the phrase, “hate the sin, love the sinner” is frequently contextualized or manipulated to fit specific social issues and groups, thus resulting in competing or opposing meanings depending on the issue at hand and the meaning intended by the speaker. For example, this phrase has been used to justify the condemnation of LGBTQ populations; as such, this represents a

situation or context of misuse, in my opinion, and should not be correlated to either Lauritzen's or my use of this phrase in the current discussion of forgiveness.

I have introduced historical and religious concepts of forgiveness that have rooted understandings and challenges in terms of behavioral practice. These concepts are important because, for the most part, they are culturally embedded in a view of forgiveness as an act following a wrongdoing, intended to repair what has been broken. If a theme is to be found, I argue that it is to understand the practice of forgiveness, based in ethical human qualities and behaviors, as fundamental to the sustenance of moral, human relationships. Furthering my argument, I reference the work of Emmanuel Lévinas, a 20th century French Jewish philosopher, whose philosophy prioritizes the individual's responsibility for the Other as a fundamental ethic of human existence. As such, it sets a foundation upon which I base the importance of moral relationships and social justice consciousness. Given such an ethical responsibility, which according to Lévinas, happens the moment we confront the face of the other, it is essential that each of us practice moral behaviors in our relationships in order to be true to these responsibilities. Lévinas (1985) wrote, "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity were I to die for it" (p. 98). This concept, "for the Other," signifies the need for embodying ethics of forgiveness so that the sense of responsibility for the Other is lived. According to Lévinas, this concept of being responsible for the Other goes beyond an acquired or adopted worldview. Rather, it is a given of human existence and, therefore, a given in human relations. Lévinas's philosophy becomes tested in practice when wrongdoings occur, whether between individuals, groups of people, or nations. As I correlate his philosophy

to my work, I conceive the role of forgiveness as recapturing our individual and collective responsibility for the other through the face of humanity. Sadly, today, the realization of our common humanity and the Other, as a human face, is seemingly lost in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nonetheless, I argue that an ethics of forgiveness, internalized and practiced, offers to this conflict, possibilities for expanding understandings of our shared human needs and values.

Similarly, whether from philosophical, religious, or political viewpoints, forgiveness is conveyed as a moral act that recognizes the importance of human relationships with others. It puts interpersonal and intrapersonal relations above deeds of wrongdoing that Arendt (1958) has addressed:

trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. (p. 240)

Continuing with Arendt's (1958) notion of the importance of forgiveness in everyday interactions, I continue exploring the problem of forgiveness as a behavior as opposed to an emotional response. If, as Arendt (1958) posited, wrongdoings are everyday occurrences that underscore our relationships with others, forgiveness must be considered a behavior that not only repairs moral relations following a wrongdoing, but that also contributes to the creation of moral relations before a wrongdoing occurs.

This examination of its historical and religious roots has provided insight into different viewpoints of what forgiveness is; that is, how it is understood in conventional contexts. In contrast, I am proposing that forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness, as



currently conceived, understate its potential to create relationships between people and among communities that reflect social justice consciousness and moral, humanistic relations. From this proposition, I will move to an exploration of *how* forgiveness, understood as a behavior necessary to the cultivation of moral relationships, can fulfill its historical and religious purposes. To underscore this premise, I am positing that forgiveness must be considered and understood as an expansion of its current, traditional definition: a practice following a wrongdoing.

### **Moral Relationships as a Behavior of Forgiveness**

In keeping with the theme of moral relations, I begin with understandings we, as humans, have of each other in our relationships. I include a quote from Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University and author of *Moral Repair*, Urban-Walker (2006) as she addresses hope, trust, and the moral order.

Our moral relations are anchored in kinds of trust. We need to trust that the moral understandings we share with others are indeed worthy and credible understandings of how to live. Hope is embedded in, is in fact a condition of, both the confidence and the trust that constitute moral relations. (p. 66)

The inference through this quote and presentations above, emphasizes the importance of forgiveness as basic humanistic elements that are required in order for us to have the hope of living moral lives of well-being. Our expectations of the other as we relate on a daily basis are grounded in a trust of how we will be treated and how we treat others.

As social beings, humans are dependent upon moral relations in order to live well among others. Moral relations signify that there are expectations of trust that as humans, we have a reasonable trust that we will be treated with dignity that demonstrates a value

of human existence. At the same time, living among others as social beings, creates vulnerability to hurt and wrongdoing among people that disrupts moral relations. In order to restore moral relationships between people, a process of moral repair that reinstates or creates trust that practices of human dignity will be practiced. Urban-Walker (2006) wrote, "Repair cannot mean return to the status quo, but must aim at bringing morally diminished or shattered relations closer to morally adequate form" (p. 26). Urban-Walker (2006) makes a distinction between the status quo of relations and those of morally adequate form, suggesting that there is a way in which we ought to be relating to each other, with moral intent. Forgiveness as a behavior as opposed to an emotional response to wrongdoing encompasses ethical human capacities and moral relationships. Given this view, forgiveness should be considered an act of moral repair that creates moral relations and social justice consciousness, meaning, that we treat others in a humanistic manner before a wrongdoing occurs. Further, forgiveness as a behavior restores a trust that moral considerations will be upheld within current and new relationships. As simplistic as this definition of forgiveness may seem, its complexities, especially in practice, challenge our human emotions, beliefs, and behaviors that reflect our world view of others and of ourselves as humans who are in constant communal relations.

I addressed these complexities in Chapter I, and I will continue to do so throughout my study by positioning forgiveness not only as a single act, but by focusing on those human capacities that I have termed ethics of forgiveness (empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and love) as aspects of forgiveness that are traits of human interactions that embrace moral relations regardless of wrongdoing having taken place. I will refer to these

aspects throughout my study as ethics of forgiveness as human qualities that are necessary not only in reparation of broken relations that restore trust and hope, but are essential in existential considerations of the human condition that is necessary in the practice of moral relations.

I also make the connection between forgiveness as a necessary element in the development and practice of social justice consciousness. To emphasize this connection, I will define social justice consciousness as a way in which we regard others in humanistic and existential considerations that embrace moral practices toward personhood. Simply stated, my intent is to explore forgiveness as a moral foundation of existence grounded in human ethics and social justice consciousness that acknowledges the worth of all human beings. Framing my conception of forgiveness in this way—as a standard of ethical thought and practice—necessarily involves a social justice awareness and vision that crosses multiple levels, from the classroom to the local community, to the world in which we are increasingly connected. This awareness and vision addresses *how* forgiveness as a behavior is applied in that if we act with sympathy, empathy, benevolence, and love toward each other, we are acting in a forgiving, moral, and humanistic way towards others. In this way, forgiveness, specifically through the practice of ethics of forgiveness, plays an essential role not only in the reparation of trusting relationships, but also in the way in which we, as social beings, relate to each other within communal settings. I suggest that forgiveness not be limited to a practice following a wrongdoing, but to be understood as a core human ethic in the treatment of others. I argue that forgiveness be elevated to an awareness that is at the forefront of ethical and moral practices that reflect

a social justice consciousness in our daily lives. In this way, the importance of forgiveness in the practice of humanistic, moral relations will be established.

Before moving on to a discussion of ethics of forgiveness, I want to address moral repair by providing an example of work related to historical trauma and reparation.

Halperin et al. (2013) studied the effects of cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive form of emotion regulation, on participating Israelis that focused on Palestinians and the conflict in general. Using two groups, a control group and a group trained in cognitive reappraisal, the researchers measured whether or not those who took part in the cognitive reappraisal training showed any differences in levels of anger at Palestinians as opposed to the control group that were not give this training. The group that were part of the cognitive reappraisal training showed greater conciliatory behavior towards policies that favored Palestinians and their rights to land and social justice needs. Their findings include, “In the theoretical realm, our results suggest that emotion-regulation strategies, such as reappraisal can influence intergroup emotions, not just intrapersonal ones, and that emotion regulation can shape political as well as affective relations” (Halperin et al., 2013, p. 109). This research suggests that there are interventions that can change deeply embedded negative emotions that have historical roots in aggressive acts towards a perceived enemy. I suggest that practices of ethics of forgiveness can contribute towards cognitive reappraisal interventions.

Next, I will outline my concepts of ethics of forgiveness and how they contribute to moral relations and social justice consciousness.

## Defining Ethics of Forgiveness

I continue to investigate the complexities of forgiveness by taking a critical look at what contributes to these complexities and their effects on the practice of moral relationships upon which a social consciousness is based. I explore forgiveness through an ethical lens, examining various human capacities such as empathy, sympathy, trust, hope, benevolence, love; in other words, framing these capacities as ethics of forgiveness. Similar to the parts of the body that make up a whole person, I suggest that ethics of forgiveness contribute to forgiveness as a whole as they are based primarily on emotions that regulate our relationships with others whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. However, I wish to elevate ethics of forgiveness beyond mere, fleeting emotions to a concept grounded in adopted values that constitute one's worldview. As such, I emphasize a distinction between the inconsistent nature of emotional responses and the conscious adoption of a values-based worldview through the work of Chaliier (1998), as addressed in her book, *What Ought I to Do: Morality in Kant and Lévinas?* In this study of Lévinasian ethics, held against the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Chaliier emphasized the uncertain, changing contexts of human emotions versus a more concrete, universal notion of human morality.

Pleasure remains uncertain, dependent on circumstances, particular and ephemeral by definition. Therefore, it cannot serve as a universal criterion for morality. Hence, the pleasure or satisfaction sometimes experienced after some deed that is termed "good" does not in any way constitute a criterion regarding the morality of that deed; in any case such feelings commit you to nothing, determine no universal design. (p. 88)

Based on this understanding, I argue that when human capacities of empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, etc. are developed within ourselves, our human capacity to relate with others has a grounding in our common concerns, needs, and vulnerabilities as human beings. Unlike emotions that typically represent in-the-moment responses, behaviors grounded in an ethical, values-based approach to human relationships validate the need to repair rather than retaliate. On this view, ethics of forgiveness anchor us to deeper existential realities concerning how we might wish to live. Given this view, when a wrongdoing between persons has occurred, emotions that include anger, grief, sadness, and other similar feelings may be trumped by those ethics of forgiveness that are important in maintaining trust and hope in ourselves and others. Having established a framework for an ethics of forgiveness as the basis for everyday practices of moral interactions, this makes a case for understanding forgiveness as a way of being and acting in the world, in contrast to an isolated response following a wrongdoing.

**Empathy in practice.** I begin by exploring empathy as an essential aspect of forgiveness in that it affects our view of others as human beings, which is a key factor in the process of forgiving. Hoffman (1981), Professor of Psychology at New York University, has studied empathy and its relationship to moral development and moral principles, such as justice. Hoffman (1981) defines empathy as “a vicarious affective response to others: that is, an affective response appropriate to someone else’s situation rather than to one’s own” (p. 128). As opposed to naming empathy as an emotion, Hoffman (1981) describes empathy as part of “expressive and feeling states . . . that are conducive to sociability and preservation of the species” (p. 129). Empathy being thought

of in this way accords motivation for certain behaviors that are primarily concerned with human preservation through prosocial relationships with others and be a causal factor in one's response to help someone who is in distress. He goes on to describe the relationship between empathy and "altruistic acts" (Hoffman, 1981, p. 128) by showing that there is a response of some kind when witnessing another's distress that Hoffman terms, "empathetic arousal" (Hoffman, 1981, p. 129) and, that this empathetic arousal serves as "the motive for a helping action" (Hoffman, 1981, p. 131). From this viewpoint, it may be concluded that empathetic responses may be part of human nature or human capacity and, with this assumption, it would follow that empathy can be nurtured as a communal moral practice in relationship with others.

Similarly, Moore (1990), Dean of the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas, describes empathy as "the focus on emotional responses to another's distress (or joy) that has become the focus in most recent investigations" (p. 76) of conceptions of empathy. Empathy requires the ability to understand the perspective of another that includes an understanding of another's feelings and concerns. Moore (1990) writes, "Clearly acquiring the capacity to understand another's viewpoint is an important (some would say essential) prerequisite for engaging in altruistic acts" (p. 77). The presence of empathy, as described by both Hoffman (1981) and Moore (1990) is essential in responses to others whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. Because of its significance in the development of moral relationships with others it stands to reason that empathy, as a practice, cannot be called upon only when

needed in certain situations, such as a wrongdoing, but is an ongoing essential practice in everyday communal activities.

The late philosopher David Novitz, formerly with the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, makes a direct connection between forgiveness and what he refers to as “empathetic thinking” (Novitz, 1998, p. 309), meaning that seeing the other’s perspective and being able to identify with another’s feelings, may create a change of attitude toward the offender. Novitz (1998) in his work addressed how the ability to empathize is acquired.

However, empathy is not something that comes naturally to us. The many wars and tribal conflicts, the endless betrayals, rapes and murders that help constitute our human history, suggest that our capacity to empathize has to be developed, and that it is, and has always been more or less limited. The development of this capacity depends greatly on prevailing cultural values. (p. 309)

In this view, empathy is considered as something that can be acquired within a value-embraced environmental culture. This view raises two very important considerations about empathy as an ethic of forgiveness. First, if empathy can be influenced by culture as Novitz (1998) suggested, practices of empathy must be made a priority in our learning and living environments if we are to create social justice consciousness. Secondly, in this view, empathy should not be solely applied to instances where wrongdoing has occurred, but must be an embedded practice that honors human worth.

I have shown that empathy is essential in relational practices that recognize the moral human qualities that we all share. Empathy as part of human nature, as seen in Hoffman’s (1981) work, provides a foundation for altruistic acts that when practiced



within communal settings becomes culturally embedded, to which Moore (1990) subscribes, as a moral practice regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. My point here is that if we embrace an understanding of empathy and its importance in the well-being of others and ourselves, human interactions will reflect social justice consciousness.

**Sympathy in practice.** I now turn to sympathy, which as a close relative of empathy, I also term as an ethic of forgiveness. Professor of Philosophy at Yale University, Stephen Darwall (1998) positions empathy and sympathy as responses to the threat to an individual's well-being. It is the threat to one's well-being that demonstrates, as humans, our capabilities to care for another. Darwall writes about sympathy in this way: "In particular I want to consider sympathy's relation to the idea of a person's *good* or *well-being*. It is obvious and uncontroversial that sympathetic concern for a person involves some concern for her good and some desire to promote it" (Darwall, 1998, p. 262). What both sympathy and empathy have in common, he posits, is in the desire to intervene, to help, or to make a situation better for the other, which takes on a moral tone.

In relation to Darwall's (1998) connection between well-being and relationships with another, I include the work of Karremans et al. (2003) that studied the relationship between forgiveness and one's psychological well-being. Similar to above, their findings included ". . . that interpersonal variables are essential to the understanding of whether or not forgiving promotes psychological well-being" (p. 1023). The interpersonal variables to which they refer may well be translated to a relationship with another that includes

practices of ethics of forgiveness such as empathy, sympathy, love, etc. As such, findings suggest that forgiveness is more readily given when moral relations are present.

Nir Eisikovits, Professor of Philosophy at Suffolk University in Boston, MA, wrote about forgiveness and the role that sympathy plays in the process. He referred to sympathy: "To sympathize with X is to imagine myself in X's circumstances, and to try to think, as independently from my own contingent attributes as possible, what I would have done in his place" (Eisikovits, 2004, p. 42). This definition is similar to the writings by Moore (1990), Darwall (1998), Hoffman (1981), and Novitz (1998) specifically regarding their emphasis on the importance of being able to relate the circumstances of the other, or wrongdoer, to one's own feelings and circumstances. However, Eisikovits (2004) provides another perspective on imagining another's circumstances or intent that may not be considered as sympathy. He wrote, "But the imagination needs something to work with. It needs data" (p. 42). To further his thoughts on this statement, he uses the example of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict between the two geographic areas, drawing on the living conditions resulting from the constructed wall and other physical barriers that block exposure to human contact to each other. The inability of a face-to-face witness of the other leaves the imagination to consider each other as enemies thus, having a false sense of security in which a barrier (the wall) is needed for protection. Media and other forms of information define the conditions of those who are propagandized as enemies, and, therefore, are imagined as such. This type of imagination, he finds, is not sympathy, but notions developed through limited circumstances and knowledge.

Eisikovits's (2004) reference to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is significant in demonstrating that human-to-human contact is necessary in order for us to gain an understanding of each other's lives and the circumstances within which we live and struggle. Without this understanding, empathy and sympathy are left to one's imagination that may not include the realities of the lived experiences of others including an understanding of how these lived experiences impact lives. Eisikovits (2004) wrote, ". . . the proclivity to act as if what we do has no specific impact on specific human beings is what I call 'Moral Blindness'" (p. 49). I might take this concept of moral blindness further by adding our proclivity to act to destroy the other through a perceived justification of "getting them before they get us" way of thinking, all based on what is imagined about the perceived enemy. The story, *A Fly Went By*, as described in Chapter I, offers a sophisticated reflection of this type of thinking. In contrast, as seen in Eisikovits's (2004) work, the intricacies of sympathy as an ethic of forgiveness, require personal interactions that provide opportunities to experience human likenesses to ourselves as opposed to relying on assumptions solely based on histories and stories. It must include a humanistic connection and view of others as deserving moral considerations within interactions regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred.

To continue this thinking, empathy and sympathy must also include a change in vision—we literally must be able to see each other—in order to understand the other's condition of living. This vision must include the ability to see the other as having the same rights as I do; as deserving the same quality of life as I have, and, according to

Darwall (1998) consideration of a person's well-being. I do not want to suggest that empathy and sympathy are limited to only those we can see or with whom we have human interactions, as both of these ethics of forgiveness as human capacities need to be experienced as we witness atrocities around the world. However, the practices of empathy and sympathy begin with those with whom we have human interactions; where moral relations can be practiced and nurtured regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. In fact, I would argue, as Novtiz (1998) did earlier, that empathy—and I will add sympathy—need to be developed, to be embedded in cultural values and practices in order to contribute to social consciousness and moral repair.

**Trust and vulnerability in practice.** I return to the writings of Urban-Walker (2006) and her concept of moral repair, on which forgiveness is an important component. I am including her writings on trust as a human capacity that not only is needed following a wrongdoing, but is what she considers as a worthiness in sustaining a moral world. I include trust as an ethic of forgiveness because of its role and importance in the developing, maintaining and repairing of moral relationships. Urban-Walker (2006) defined trust as, “In trusting one has *normative expectations* of others, expectations of others that they will do what they should and hence that we are entitled to hold them to it, if only in the form of rebuking and demanding feelings” (2006, p. 80). The implication of normative expectations is that we expect others to behave with good will towards others, to respect the differences that others may practice (religious, cultural, etc.) and basically rely on an assumption that people are interested in doing good. Certainly there are different expectations of trust depending on the relationships that one has. For instance,

one may trust a family member to behave with another family member's best interest, or trust that someone will behave responsibly showing concern for others. Urban-Walker (2006) wrote, "There is a sense in which, in myriad activities of daily life, we trust 'people'. We trust *that* they will behave as they should" (p. 84). I understand her meaning to include a belief that we, as humans, have an inherent understanding that humans possess integrity and are ultimately competent to develop moral relationships with others. This type of trusting goes beyond specific behaviors and is what Urban-Walker refers to as "default trust" (p. 83), or normative expectations of reliability and safety. If we think about not being able to trust, there is no foundation on which moral relations can be built.

A basic question to ask is whether we should automatically trust others knowing there may be a risk that this trust will be broken, or is it better to not trust others until that trust is somehow earned. Trust, as an ethic of forgiveness, is a fundamental element of moral relations and must be present prior to a wrongdoing. If it were not, there would be nothing to repair. On this point, Urban-Walker (2006) wrote, "Trust is the ground of moral relations; our reactive responses to breaches of normative expectations by each other and by ourselves aim to keep us morally grounded" (p. 96). In other words, we need to react when trust has been broken, which signifies that there is an understanding of moral expectations that we have in each other.

In comparison to the complexities of sympathy that I addressed above, I see similarities with the issue of trust. Using the same example of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, trust can come to mean a trust that the *intention* of the other side is to destroy the other creating the *expectation* that if one trusts in the humanistic characteristics of the

other, it will lead to total destruction. Both Israeli and Palestinian citizens may have trust that without the physical barriers that separate the countries and without military intervention, each would destroy the people of the other's land. The conflict has created perceptions that have replaced trust with an imagination of mistrust about the Other's intentions of destruction. The issue of historical trauma, which I introduced in Chapter I as a challenge to forgiveness, readily applies here. The experiences in the Holocaust and continuing conflict in the Middle East region of the world has created an expectation and intention of destruction of the other. The effects of historical trauma to both Israelis and Palestinians have clouded the ability to see the other as having any human similarities to themselves. Empathy, sympathy, and trust have been buried along with hope of reconciliation and living with each other through practices of moral relations. Forgiveness is challenged in this situation, but not impossible. Bringing an awareness of human capacities of empathy, sympathy, trust, love and benevolence are what the task of forgiveness faces with regard to this conflict.

As a prerequisite to trust, I include a discussion of vulnerability. To further illustrate the relationship among forgiveness, trust and vulnerability, I refer to Barbara Misztal, professor of Sociology at University of Leicester, UK. Her research indicates that trust has historically been studied from a civil society perspective, specifically with regard to trust in governments and intent. More recently, trust has been linked with levels of risk-taking within societies. From these findings, Misztal (2011) asserted, "In short, the nature of risk society, together with the process of individualization, is responsible for the growing deficit of trust" (p. 360). In turn, vulnerability is perceived as one's

susceptibility to harm or danger and aligns itself with an uncertainty in which trust plays a part. Both trust and vulnerability are complex phenomena that are dependent on whether the viewpoint is coming from a personal perspective (relationships between people), a social perspective (relationships between groups of people), or a political perspective (relationships between people and organizations). The train of thought that I present here provides an overview of the complexities that notions of trust cultivate when historical trauma has been experienced, as has been previously discussed. According to Misztal (2011), “One of the main characteristics of trust is the renunciation of guard or defense” (p. 363). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if trusting is viewed as becoming “defenseless,” there is clarity in understanding that any suggestion of trust may arouse fears and threat. In the following passage, Misztal (2011) reinforced the connection between vulnerability and one’s inability to trust.

In short, it can be said that . . . vulnerability allows [one] to capture painful experiences which diminish the emotional capacities with individuals and lower possibilities for realizing our individuality as well as reduce chances of collaborative relationships with others who either are seen as responsible for our traumas and emotional wounds or as wounded or damaged by us. (p. 366)

Upon the realization and belief that one’s worldview needs to and can change, I argue that the practice of forgiveness can then serve as a restoration process that allows for collaborative relationships to be rebuilt. Through open communication and active practicing of forgiveness, one can demonstrate a worthiness of trust based on developing or renewing moral relations, whether the process involves individuals, groups, or political adversaries. In her book, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Misztal (2003) stated,

“However, a successful re-establishment of trust and a reconstruction of cooperation, which are goals of political reconciliation, require not only forgiveness but also the changes of institutional structures and policies” (as cited in Misztal, 2011, p. 374). Her statement reinforces the fact that forgiveness is complex and requires a collective engagement process that includes individuals, communities, and governments. Collective engagement processes offer an additional challenge to forgiveness when government structures do not necessarily subscribe to the goals of trust or reconciliation—such as the Israeli government—placing efforts for peaceful resolution solely on a communal level.

**Hope in practice.** Closely related to trust is hope which Urban-Walker (2006) references as needing to interact with each other for purposes of developing moral relations. “If repairing moral relations requires securing or restoring that trust, and that trust needs hope to stabilize or recreate it, then morally reparative measures must often aim at restoring or igniting hope” (2006, p. 44). To destroy the human ability to hope, she wrote, is “one of the most morally abhorrent features of wrongdoing and as a grave wrong in and of itself” (p. 44). I situate hope as an ethic of forgiveness because of its importance in the development of moral relations and social justice consciousness regardless if a wrongdoing has occurred. I consider hope to be engrained in humanism that invests us in a future in which we envision lives of well-being. Where I see the concept of hope diverging from one of trust is in hope’s futuristic context, whereas trust is based in the present. However, even with this divergence, there is a dependency of hope on trust, such as hopefulness that one will be able to trust another in order to create meaningful and moral relationships. The future of possibilities are embedded in hope that



allows an escape from present situations. As an ethic of forgiveness, hope embraces the possibility that lives can be better lived and wrongdoings can be repaired and trust restored.

Also writing about hope, H. Svi Shapiro, Professor of Education and Cultural Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, addressed it in terms of the human condition.

Perhaps hope is found in the very act of challenging and changing the world, serving others and getting involved politically as citizens. Or perhaps hope requires a reaching into the spiritual roots of the human condition, connecting to the timeless and mysterious impulses that seem to be present in all the great faiths of humanity, reminding us of the abiding need for justice, for love, and for peace. (Shapiro, 2006, p. 43)

Shapiro's writings bring together the intent of religious teachings of forgiveness and forgiveness as a behavior encouraging involvement in practices of forgiveness, especially in areas of conflict such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If hope is within the human condition, then it makes sense that hope is a human desire to create a world dependent on moral relations and makes ethics of forgiveness at the forefront of creating that world. I consider hope to be a human value that is part of the imagination that is so important as we addressed sympathy and empathy above. Hope is what imagination needs in order to imagine lives of well-being; however, rarely are hope and imagination thought of as connected. Hope, as an ethic of forgiveness, makes that connection in its relevance to possibilities of social justice consciousness through its futuristic conception. I also argue that hope is essential in the ability to take and accept the risk faced when developing trusting relationships.

Hope may play a role in minimizing imagined consequences of broken trust, or absence of trust of which Eisikovits (2004) wrote. Hope may, therefore, play a role in lessening one's consideration of risk in developing relationships. In the most devastating of situations for people, hope offers possibilities that opportunities for relief, for change, can be imagined and possible. Urban-Walker (2006) addressed the importance of encouraging hope as, "The fact remains that people not only have hope for things they want or believe they need, but also have needs for hope itself, where that is all there is against inertness, terror, or despair" (p. 57). Hope, as presented here, imparts the value of hope as a human capacity that is essential as an ethic of forgiveness in that it allows us to accept the risk of human relations regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. Instilling and recognizing the importance of hope as a human need, according to Urban-Walker (2006), is a compelling argument that forgiveness be considered a practice of moral relationships and social justice consciousness.

To continue my examination of forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness, I will address human capacities of love, benevolence, and compassion that are closely related to each other. I begin this section with a look at the role of compassion as it informs moral relationships.

**Compassion in practice.** Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2003), Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, began her writing on compassion with the introduction of a play based on the Trojan wars and the destruction of Troy by Greek armies. The play, while depicting acts of murder and rape, compels its audience to imagine the moral value of compassion through an understanding of the human capacity

for suffering. The point she seems to be making in this writing is the importance of bringing awareness to the relationship between compassion and terror. We have seen countless examples (September 11, 2001 being one) where tragedy can bring out compassionate feelings and behaviors among us as well as great fear and trauma. Nussbaum (2003) posed, “Is compassion, with all its limits, our best hope as we try to educate citizens to think well about human relations both inside the nation and across national boundaries?” (p. 12). Considering compassion as being closely related to empathy and sympathy, Nussbaum emphasized the core understanding that compassion must include a humanitarian consideration of the other. Furthermore, she addressed the dual nature of compassion similar to the way in which Eisikovits (2004) addressed two sides of imagination; that one can imagine the other as a human being with feelings, such as those we all hold, or one can imagine the other as constituting a threat to our well-being. Conversely, Nussbaum (2003) suggested a complicating view of compassion that would seem to negate its seemingly inherent connection to sympathy or empathy, writing, “Similarly, compassion for our fellow Americans can all too easily slip over into a desire to make America come out *on top* and to subordinate other nations” (p. 13). I see this as a “selective compassion” that differs from a notion of compassion rooted in humanistic consideration of the other. In fact, I would argue that, in this final instance, there is no compassion. Rather, this one-sided treatment of compassion borders more on the line of ethno-centric narcissism that can result in vengeful actions aimed at destroying the other.

Nussbaum (2003) explained that with compassion come conditions that can negate one’s deserving of it. For example, if we hold the belief that a population lives in

poverty because people are lazy, compassion for their plight of poverty is seen as undeserved. I would consider this, again, as selective compassion because it is dependent upon one's frame of reference about a certain person, population, or perceived social standing. As an ethic of forgiveness, however, compassion, along with sympathy, empathy, trust, etc., is grounded in a framework of ethics and morals that defines how we view the particular capacities that are unique to being human.

At this point, I refer back to the example of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that Eisikovits (2004) introduced; that is, if the Israeli on one side of the wall imagines that the Palestinian on the other side wishes to destroy the Israeli, the tendency to feel compassion for the other is negligible, if present at all. Again, there needs to be an understanding of this view in order for forgiveness to play a role in creating moral relations between Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine.

Returning to the work of Novitz (1998), his emphasis on the impact of cultural values on one's ability to empathize certainly holds true regarding one's ability to feel compassion. In other words, the individual's propensity to intentionally engage and express her humanistic capacities toward others often bumps up against cultural values and living environments that have been compromised by painful and destructive experiences brought on by political and social circumstances. Either way, the ability to call upon one's moral values and, at the same time, withstand external forces that would seek to break them down, stand as emotionally-charged challenges that complicate decisions about how to move forward. This situation is exactly what contributes to the complexities of forgiveness, previously mentioned, and the ethics that make up its

practices. Nussbaum (2003) provided some hope for addressing the conflict as she wrote about compassion.

What I am suggesting then is that the education of emotion, to succeed at all needs to take place in a culture of ethical criticism, and especially self-criticism, in which ideas of equal respect for humanity will be equal players in the effort to curtail the excesses of the greedy self. (p. 25)

Along with others who have addressed the importance of values, Nussbaum (2003) emphasized a view of society that values human dignity and moral human relations as expressed in human practice, essential to the repair and maintenance of moral relations and the development of social justice consciousness.

**Benevolence and love in practice.** I address benevolence by referencing the work of Prager and Solomon (1995) of Tel Aviv University, who conducted a study on perceptions of world benevolence by Israeli Holocaust survivors. Their study attempted to take a critical look at how or if people who have experienced personal trauma consider the world in benevolent terms. They wrote, “World benevolence, or the goodness of the world, relates to the extent to which the individual perceives the world as a place in which events have positive outcomes, and in which people are essentially good and supportive of others” (p. 272). Understandably, they found that Holocaust survivors perceived the world as being less benevolent than those who were not Holocaust survivors. Views that the world is not a benevolent place translated into reflections that there is no goodness in human nature. Conversely, when being asked about *self-worth*, there was no significant difference between Holocaust survivors and non-Holocaust survivors. Significant here is that the Holocaust survivor does not see himself or herself

as having less worth, but does see the world as having less worth. Although there were variables that affected findings such as the participant's health, religious beliefs, and gender differences, I focus on the implications of one's traumatic experiences deliberately at the hands of others and one's view of the world. Much of the bitterness was due to the world taking no action to stop the atrocities of the Holocaust. Secondly, findings showed that due to rehabilitation being suppressed once the atrocities ended suggested that restoring a view of the world as benevolent was not easily attained. Not only must the abuse end, but healing must include a supportive and trusting environment that includes justice for those who suffered. One may conclude that benevolence, as an aspect of ethics of forgiveness, contributes to one's view that the world is controllable, just, and operates from goodness. In this case and others of similar atrocities, forgiveness will be challenged to not only repair moral relations between people, but alter one's view to that of a morally adequate world. It also suggests that creating social consciousness through practices of moral relationships is far more difficult to create following a wrongdoing of this proportion than creating social consciousness through practices of moral relationships before a wrongdoing occurs.

Lastly, I address love as an ethic of forgiveness because of its importance in recognition and treatment of humanity. Griswold (2007) connects love and forgiveness through a humanistic view as "Forgiveness is 'love' in the sense that it affirms our commonality, as human beings, with the morally worst amongst us" (p. 34). Similarly, hooks (2000) wrote about love, "To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust as well as open

and honest communication” (p. 5). hooks (2000) explains that these human capacities are all developed qualities that we extend to ourselves and others, especially through forgiveness. She describes forgiveness as “clear[ing] a path on the way to love. It is a gesture of respect” (p. 139). As with trust, empathy, sympathy, benevolence and other ethics of forgiveness, love is not something that occurs in isolation. It needs a community that benefits from reciprocal love, care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment and trust for purposes of healing, such as forgiveness provides. “Healing is an act of communion” (p. 215) and “compassion and forgiveness reconnect us” (p. 217) according to hooks (2000). Loving, as an ethic of forgiveness, like trust, contributes to our ability to take risks in developing relationships and to view others through a social justice lens.

Up to this point I have outlined concepts of forgiveness from historical and religious perspectives that contribute to understandings of how forgiveness has become viewed in current culture. By including ethics of forgiveness, my intent is to bring another dimension of forgiveness as practices and behaviors based on moral interactions and human considerations within relationships. I have throughout linked moral relations and social justice consciousness as borne from forgiveness and will next further define what I mean by social justice consciousness and its relation to forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness and Social Justice Consciousness**

From the time of Plato, philosophers have been inquiring into what is justice, and what makes a society just. These inquiries have included discussions and debates on what constitutes human equality, equal treatment of all people, and the equal and fair distribution of resources. Along this line of thought, Miller (1999) investigated historical

and [then] contemporary understandings of social justice through socio-political lenses in order to find common ground regarding how all people should be treated in a socially just world.

When, more concretely, we attack some policy or some state of affairs as socially unjust, we are claiming that a person, or more usually a category of persons, enjoys fewer advantages than that person or group of persons ought to enjoy (or bears more of the burdens than they ought to bear), given how other members of the society in question are faring. (Miller, 1999, p. 1)

I relate Miller's (1999) statement about unjust political policy and social practices specifically to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Implicit in this occupation is the obstruction of basic human rights that are naturally accessible to Israeli citizens living in a free and democratic society. Recognition of the injustice of this study's present situation addresses the need to create social justice consciousness among those who are responsible for initiating and implementing policies that oppress certain populations. An enlarged social justice consciousness would bring to the forefront an exposure of current injustices and generate action to repair. For purposes of connecting social justice consciousness to forgiveness, I conceptualize social justice as a construct of moral human relations. Within this construct, I posit that forgiveness plays a pivotal role because it informs the ways in which people and nations can choose to interact with each other in times of both peace and conflict. As I have previously posed, ethics of forgiveness must become habits of human behavior through practice in order to create moral relationships and promote social justice consciousness. Given this stance, working towards social justice consciousness is not conditional upon the repair of a wrongdoing.



In a socially just society, human dignity and respect represent basic human qualities that must be mutually accorded in order to sustain a society grounded in freedom and equality. On this point, Miller (1999) wrote, “Thus, if people are to have dignity and respect in this society now, it must be the kind of dignity and respect that social equality provides” (p. 241). As multicultural societies continue to grow, it is essential that that governing systems recognize and practice democratic principles of freedom and equality to ensure social justice for all. It is imperative that people from all cultures be regarded as humans deserving of moral treatment based on identified ethics of forgiveness.

The late author and professor of political science at the University of Chicago, Iris Marion Young, wrote extensively on responsibility of justice that arises from social connectedness. She included in her writings, “There are some moral obligations that moral human beings have to one another as human; these are cosmopolitan obligations or obligations to respect human rights” (Young, 2006, p. 103). She argued that human obligation requires us, as humans, to minimize the suffering of others, regardless of who they are or where they live. If we adopt this view, it can be assumed that if we do not actively engage in minimizing the suffering of others, we are not living up to our obligations as moral beings. If we do not take responsibility, as human beings having social connections, we are purposely supporting structures of social injustice. Young (2006) surmised, “Structural injustice is a kind of moral wrong distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the willfully repressive policies of a state” (p. 114). Returning to Eisikovits’s (2004) example of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the refusal to

recognize the other side as human beings perpetuates the conflict and strengthens the structures of social injustice. Responsibility is assigned to the other for purposes of retribution, which Young explains, is a “backward looking condemnation” (2006, p. 121) of the other. Forward-looking social structures can be seen as responsibility being taken by the collective, such as the work of the Parent’s Bereavement Circle/Family Forum, which is an organization that brings Israeli and Palestinian families, who have lost loved ones due to the countries’ conflict, together to work towards peaceful resolution. Their work asks for accountability without retribution.

Prior to including forgiveness into this section on justice and equality, I introduce the work of Douzinas (2013) who wrote about the failed legal and political policies that have been instituted especially in countries following human rights violations. He focused on the dominance of power and its restructuring and defining of human rights and what they mean to “other” individuals based on a dominating structure. He wrote, “Morality (and rights as morality’s main building block in late capitalism) was always part of the dominant order, in close contact with each epoch’s forms of power” (p. 51). He refers to human rights as being “co-opted to a large number of relatively independent discourses, practices, institutions, and campaigns” (p. 52). The significance of this view to this study is in having an assumption of what people want and who shall supply it based on the views of the dominant power. In this case, if the occupation ends, will it be Israel that decides what is good for Palestinians and what constitutes justice for the “other” or will Palestinians be able to define that for themselves? The possibility of recognition of humanity in a political structure that is by its nature hegemonic, needs to be well

thought out, and I include it here to be considered as social justice and humanity are further addressed.

To weave in forgiveness, I return to the work of Karremans and Van Lange (2005) that takes a critical look at forgiveness to determine whether it is detrimental to justice or enhances it. They question that if people relate forgiveness to mercy and mercy to forgoing justice, then forgiveness may hold a negative connotation. We have seen this stream of thinking throughout this study through the work of Griswold's (2007) interpretation of Aristotle's view on excess of forgiveness, Hampton's work on retributive justice, and Murphy's writings on mercy and justice (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Forgiveness seen in this way may logically contribute to its lack of practice or at the very least put forgiveness in a competitive relation to justice. Karremans and Van Lange's (2005) research, however, find this conception not to be true. Their findings include, "Rather than acting as a barrier to forgiveness, findings of three studies, in which various primes of justice as well as other prosocial values were employed, enhanced the propensity to forgive" (p. 295). What this may mean then, is that the ability to forgive is dependent upon the level of social justice in which one believes and practices, making a social justice consciousness a primary value in order for forgiveness to occur.

### **Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

This section of my study will focus on the educational system as a setting to promote socially justice educational practices through an integration of behaviors of forgiveness. It seems fitting to focus on the current American educational system as a forum for learning about forgiveness as this setting is one where engagement of students,

teachers, and administrators occurs daily. It may be said that the educational system is a reflection of a community where people form relationships through human interactions and, therefore, I build on a theoretical argument that humanistic pedagogy depends on the establishment of community in educational settings. Given this argument, I propose that models of moral relations with others can be developed within the American educational system that reflect humanistic principles of behavior. Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) addresses the connection between moral relations and community by describing the need to bring together our natural human concerns for the other and for the self. Addressing the importance of the moral community in his writing, Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) states, “Morality is not simply something to be believed in; it is something to be *cared* about. This caring includes concern about those persons (including oneself) who are the proper objects of moral attention” (p. 18). He stressed, “Forgiveness is acceptable only in cases where it is consistent with self-respect, respect for others as responsible moral agents . . .” (p. 19).

The relationship between the responsibility one has to the other and its implications in student-teacher relationships is argued through the work of Emmanuel Lévinas’s philosophy of ethics and through subjectivity, and Nel Noddings’s ethics of care as critiqued by Zhao (2011). Noddings emphasizes that humans are “ontologically related to others” (p. 238) making relations a natural phenomenon, and, therefore, there is a natural caring for the other that is the basis of her ethics of caring. No intervention is needed to *create* relationships as Noddings argues because the mere fact that we are humans, makes us relational, ethical beings. In similar thought, Lévinas’s concern is the

responsibility for the other, not an intentional choice, but a responsibility because of our very being. Zhao (2011) points out, “Lévinas’s phenomenological analysis of human existential experiences as social beings shows that from the very beginning of our existence, we are with others, our self, our egos, is already profoundly affected by such encounters” (p. 242). Both Noddings and Lévinas have established that relations and the responsibilities we have to them, cannot be separated from our existence as humans. In other words, ethical relations are not a choice. What does this mean for education if we cannot teach students to become ethical beings? Zhao addresses this question as: “Thus, the task of education becomes to unmask our ego and to urge both students and ourselves to listen to the deep sound of our responsibility to the other. We can assist students in their daily struggle to rationally and consciously come to terms with themselves” (p. 243). I consider his reference of coming to terms with the self, similar to Murphy’s references to human concerns for others and self, as well as his reference to self-respect (Murphy & Hampton, 1988).

The importance of community, in the context of human development, is also addressed through the work of Osterman (2000) who wrote about the student, specifically, and his or her need to be connected to a community in order to feel worthy of love and respect. The relatedness that a community provides “affects people’s perceptions of others, leading people to view friends and group members more favorably and to think about them more often and in more complex ways” (Osterman, 2000, p. 327). Ensuring that students are connected to a community within the educational setting that actively

practices ethics of forgiveness, promotes the development of social justice consciousness and equity, important components within a pedagogy of forgiveness.

I turn to the work of Freire (1970) who is revered for his use of critical pedagogy that connects community to education as it emphasizes dialogical relationships, human interaction and individual empowerment. Freire wrote about freedom from oppression in both educational and political contexts. “Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). This profound statement links well with my conception of a pedagogy of forgiveness as students are able to freely express themselves and explore relationships with others. On this view, humanistic educational practices that encourage independent thinking and self-expression support and reinforce the developmental nature of young people striving toward human completion.

To extend Freire’s point as it relates to the contemporary educational model, the freedom of which he speaks cannot be found within a standardized curriculum. Rather, individual freedom is intrinsically developed with extrinsic humanistic nurturing. In effect, the neoliberal educational model borrows from Freire’s (1970) “banking concept of education” (p. 73) that positions students as objects in which teachers are required to deposit information, thus ensuring that a controlled, neoliberal conception of liberation is externally defined and internally accepted by the objectified student. Based on Freire’s notion of freedom. I include liberation as a principle of forgiveness because it validates freedom of thought, expression, and action—in decidedly humanistic terms—for students and teachers alike.

The importance of education in presenting opportunities for freedom of thought is supported through the writings of McKnight (2004) who addresses the role of pedagogy in creating social justice consciousness, specifically with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. McKnight targets the perpetuation of historical trauma through experiences of fear and anger, arguing that through reparative pedagogies, that include forgiveness, legacies of historical trauma can be changed. McKnight wrote, “I examine the concept of forgiveness in similar vein regarding its ability to redirect memory toward reparative action and the affirmation of human rights” (p. 140). He bases much of his work on Freire’s “notions surrounding the elimination of oppressive relationships” (p. 143) and adopts Freire’s critical pedagogy concepts as described above. His point is that there need to be safe pedagogical places where people can freely investigate their circumstances that offers a new understanding of how we think about and feel about traumatic events. It is in this setting that he sets forgiveness as creating the ability for all to realize a common humanity.

To further emphasize the need for pedagogical settings that encourage free thinking, the late Purpel (1989), critiques the contemporary education models with an emphasis on competition as the path to individual success. Through his writing on care and compassion, Purpel makes the case that caring and compassion, once encouraged as positive values within educational settings, have been submerged under contemporary education systems. He wrote, “The stress on competition and individuality narrows and undermines this impulse to care and nourish” (Purpel, 1989, p. 40). Purpel also makes the point that today’s students are not encouraged to show sympathy for others, especially to

those who are not victors of competitions, whether such competitions are related to academics, sports, school performances, popularity contests, and other forms of school-based recognition. In fact, Purpel contends that distancing from emotions such as caring and concern for others is encouraged in modern school culture leading to, in his view, an erosion in social responsibility. Purpel (1989) responds to this erosion in social responsibility by addressing love and liberation in his discussion of educational goals through his writing, “The development of critical and imaginative capacities is absolutely critical to an educational program of liberation, justice and love – they represent both conditions for, and results of, such a program” (p. 128). In contrast, Purpel’s view of the human capacity to build a world of love and joy gives hope to the creation of a pedagogy of forgiveness within educational settings.

Building on Purpel’s view of the need to develop critical and imaginative capacities, I’m relating his thinking to youth development processes as they relate to learning. The connection between the development of these capacities to which he refers and youth development processes is based on both physiological issues inherent in human development and environmental conditions that nurture the developmental process. To support this connection, I include the work of Anna Stetsenko, professor of Developmental Psychology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2002). Stetsenko writes extensively on human development processes and learning readiness in educational settings, grounding her work in human development and learning in a sociocultural framework theory that addresses the development of children’s minds.



This theory posits that children's minds develop as a result of constant interactions with the social world—the world of people who do things with and for each other, who learn from each other and use the experiences of previous generations to successfully meet the demands of life in the present. (Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2002, p. 87)

Based on Stetsenko and Arievidt's (2002) work in this area, I will argue that if we are able to understand the necessary relationship between human development and human learning processes, traditional teaching practices that are driven solely by cognitive-based standardized curriculum can be replaced with critical pedagogical concepts that embrace human development and learning as naturally integrated processes that are fundamental to one another.

In closure of this section, I have dedicated Chapter VI to a Pedagogy of Forgiveness that brings together elements of natural human concerns for another and our responsibility to each other as social beings with the creation of learning environments that nurture these natural elements. As such, a pedagogy of forgiveness that is deliberate in recognizing and addressing these phenomena will contribute to the building of moral relations and social justice consciousness.

### **Conceptual Framework**

I developed the conceptual framework of this study based on key theoretical concepts, derived from the review of the literature, that inform the research problem, the methodology, and overall design of the study. Specifically, I relied on the writings of theorists who provided a historical perspective on philosophical notions of forgiveness that include religious teachings embedded in current religious tenets and practices (Griswold, 2007; Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Sadler, 2009; Lerner, 2003; Newman, 2013;

Wiesenthal, 1995; Arendt, 1958; Lauritzen, 1987; Lévinas, 1985). Secondly, I am using behavioral theories of forgiveness as study frameworks in order to address forgiveness through principles that I have defined as ethics of forgiveness, including empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, and other human capacities that define the ways in which we relate to others (Darwall, 1998; Eisikovitz, 2004; Hoffman, 1981; hooks, 2000; Karremans et al., 2003; Miller, 1999; Misztal, 2011; Moore, 1990; Novitz, 1998; Nussbaum, 2003; Prager & Solomon, 1995; Shapiro, 2006; Young, 2006). Based on these theoretical perspectives, I focused the research problem on the potential of understanding forgiveness as chosen behavior in contrast to forgiveness understood as an emotional response. In turn, I developed research questions intended to explore study participants' perspectives and practices of forgiveness. I chose the case study methodology in which I conducted semi-structured interviews (of selected Israelis, Palestinians, and American individuals invested in conflict resolution), including open-ended questions, to investigate each participant's views and experiences pertaining to forgiveness. Because of its historical, religious, and political foundations, I chose the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to study whether or not the practice of forgiveness could impact such a deeply embedded state of conflict over time. In other words, I determined that a study of forgiveness—a phenomenon also mired in historical, religious, and political abstractions and contradictions—was well suited to an enduring struggle that has impacted individuals, families, and communities on both sides. In my view, a conflict of this magnitude and historical duration is comparable in complexity to longstanding and competing worldviews of forgiveness.

To finalize my interview questions, I posed to each interviewee the question of whether or not forgiveness can be taught and, if so, in what context. Together with theorists who wrote on various pedagogies (Freire, 1970; McKnight, 2004; Noddings, 1988; Osterman, 2000; Purpel, 1989; Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2002; Zhao, 2011), I will incorporate responses and theoretical notions in a final chapter.

Finally, the case study approach, grounded in in-depth interviews that will be coded and analyzed for emergent themes, provides the opportunity to uncover perspectives of forgiveness based on lived experiences with ongoing conflict that often includes violence. In its final analysis, this research has the potential to highlight the issue of forgiveness in a global context and potentially inform future studies.

### **Chapter Summary**

My intent has been to present many aspects of forgiveness from its definition and historical roots to its relationship with moral practices in personal, communal, and global relations. My focus throughout has been to determine the role that forgiveness plays in reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine where deep-rooted conflict and violence is inflicted upon each other's people on a daily basis. Finding this determination requires an understanding of current views of forgiveness and how and when it should be practiced. Exploring forgiveness to its fullest extent also raises challenges to understanding its practical application. For instance, answers need to be addressed to many questions that arise such as, how does forgiveness move from a theoretical concept to an actual practice that creates moral repair? How does it move from a mere apologetic response to a behavior that creates moral relations and social justice

consciousness? How does one reconcile with someone who has committed an evil act, as Griswold asks?

To address these questions, I suggest that a view of forgiveness as effective only following a wrongdoing limits its power of creating moral relationships *regardless* of a wrongdoing. I introduce practices of ethics of forgiveness that regard humans as deserving of dignity and respect and that promote moral relations in everyday living. Aspects of ethics of forgiveness that I name as empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, trust, compassion, and hope are ways in which we relate in a moral fashion towards one another. Practices of ethics of forgiveness are what can move forgiveness from a purely theoretical concept to actual behaviors that create moral relations and social justice consciousness. They are behaviors that communicate how we view the other and ourselves, and communicate an understanding of the value of our humanness. Most importantly, they are behaviors that can be practiced *regardless* if a wrongdoing has occurred, and, therefore, act as a foundation that sets standards of moral behavior between people, communities, and globally. In addition, I propose that these behaviors can be taught, either formally or informally within communal settings such as schools, community organizations, and political bodies.

At this juncture, my study has relied on theoretical frameworks from historical and religious perspectives followed by an exploration of forgiveness that moves it from theory to practices. As such, in Chapter IV I include interviews with Israeli, Palestinian, and U.S. citizens who are either living amongst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or are actively engaged in the conflict's resolution and, some of whom have lost family

members as a result of the conflict. By capturing these personal views of forgiveness as they relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its role in resolution and reconciliation, I hope to gain insight into how practical applications of forgiveness can be applied. This insight is vital to promoting moral repair, moral relationships, and social justice consciousness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I will discuss methodology, scope and design of my study, and study limitations and future recommendations in Chapter III.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODS OF STUDY**

My study blends an analysis of theoretical frameworks of forgiveness and the case study qualitative interview method to test the practice of forgiveness within those theoretical frameworks.

This blending is what I perceive to be at the heart of qualitative research. Editors Denzin and Lincoln (1994) offered a definition of qualitative research.

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)

The interviews of key people directly engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their perspectives on forgiveness as a behavior leading to peaceful coexistence of people living in the two geographic areas, have provided the meanings that will be interpreted and analyzed within this study. In order to bring meaning that reflects the purpose of my study, this chapter, Methods of Study, will include my rationale for choosing the case study qualitative research approach. Within this approach, I include methods and reasoning for choosing data resources (interviewees), design and scope of the study, ethical principles used in interview procedures, methods for coding data, study limitations and suggested further research, and chapter summary to provide a holistic understanding of study purpose.

### **Design and Scope of Study**

I designed this study to take a critical look at how theories of forgiveness are applicable to behaviors that create moral relations and social justice consciousness. I introduced historical and philosophical conceptions of forgiveness as how forgiveness *should work* and included religious conceptions as how forgiveness *should be* practiced. These historical and religious concepts have framed forgiveness as a practice that is reserved for application following a wrongdoing. However, my study considers broadening that concept to a human practice among others through ethics of forgiveness regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred.

I chose to investigate the authenticity of these theories through interviews with those involved with the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. My aim was to assess the possibility of whether or not rooted conceptions of forgiveness can change to reflect a broader definition and contribute to social justice consciousness. I combine theoretical concepts, socially-accepted concepts, personal experiences with forgiveness, and first-hand accounts from those who live in or are involved in long standing and embedded climates of personal destruction and trauma.

As my problem statement suggests, forgiveness as a behavior rather than an emotional response to wrongdoing is the basis for my entering into this work. I chose to focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in my interview process for various reasons. First, as a Jewish woman, I am personally connected to ensuring the future of Israel as a vibrant country that can free itself from choosing destruction of others as a means to ensure its existence. I commit myself to the teachings of Judaism that value moral relations and

humanitarian practices of social justice and, given the current conflict between the two geographic areas, I am hoping, through forgiveness, to find resolution and practices of reconciliation that will return relations to those reflected in Jewish beliefs. Through interviews with Israeli and Palestinian citizens and others who are engaged in creating moral relations between Israel and the Palestinian territories, I hope to understand how those who personally experience the conflict interpret the social world in which they live. I find this interpretation significant as an understanding that one's lived experiences effect a view of the world at large. I will let the data speak to this interpretation through each participant's conception of forgiveness and its role in creating moral relations and social justice consciousness among people with long histories of conflict and political structures that are not working towards peaceful resolution.

### **Case Study Qualitative Research**

I chose the case study qualitative research approach as I wanted an in-depth exploration into the longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine using voices from those who are personally engaged in the conflict in some way. Zainal (2007) wrote on the case study research method.

Case study research, through reports of past studies, allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues. Through case study methods, a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions through the actor's perspective. (p. 1)

In this study, I “describe one or more cases in-depth and address the research questions and issues” (Patton, 2002, p. 363) in order to show themes that would provide greater understanding from the perspectives of people from Israeli and Palestinian populations as



well as those who were actively engaged in the political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Engagement includes public speaking, writing, facilitating, and development and participation in organizations having the sole purpose of reconciliation between the Israel and the Palestinian territories. Choosing the case study method also came about by eliminating other qualitative study characteristics such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. Although forgiveness is a phenomenon that is central to my study, I eliminated phenomenology as an approach, as I wanted to find out less about how my study subjects considered forgiveness as a lived experience where feelings, judgments and experiences are bracketed out specific to a phenomenon (forgiveness). Instead, I am probing the phenomenon of forgiveness using a case study method. Stake (1994) wrote, “The researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer *opportunity to learn*” (p. 243). As such, my choice here is to use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the case from which I can learn the most. I also eliminated the ethnography approach as I am not studying the cultural characteristics of a group of people, although I do include issues of culture and historical trauma as pertinent to barriers of conflict resolution. Lastly, the grounded theory method was eliminated because rather than a focus on how or why theoretical concepts of forgiveness are effective or not, instead, I want to know *if* forgiveness exists in the worldview of my interviewees with regard to moral repair between Israeli and Palestinian populations.

I included the Hebrew quote in my Introduction to Chapter I to convey a focus on humanism—seeing the face of the other in human context—as a basis for my study on

forgiveness. The reason is based on the belief that the recognition of human qualities—that include human feelings, desires to love and be loved, and the need for relationships with others—are human qualities of sameness and rationality that abate division and inequality of power. My study, including the interviews, carry the human-to-human theme. The case study methodology of data collection through face-to-face interviews, fittingly embraced this theme through an exploration of worldviews and concepts of humanism.

. . . the detailed qualitative accounts often produced in case studies not only help to explore or describe the data in real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of real-life situations, which may not be captured through experimental or survey research. (Zainal, 2007, p. 4)

The case study approach allowed for an exploration of approaches to the complexities of real life experiences, i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that are integral to the main framing of this study, forgiveness as a behavior rather than an apologetic response.

Conversely, the case study methodology approach has its criticisms with regard to its research value and contributions to the social sciences that researcher Flyvbjerg (2006) referred to as “conventional wisdom about case-study research” (p. 219). Flyvbjerg identifies and addresses five criticisms of the case study method and refers to them as misunderstandings. These criticisms, also referred to as conventional wisdom, included commentary such as, “the case study contains bias toward verification . . . preconceived notions; one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case . . . therefore, [case studies] cannot contribute to scientific development” (p. 221). As such, these criticisms negate the data and conclusions that case study researchers present. I include these

criticisms to first, acknowledge an understanding of case study critics within some research communities, but more importantly, to arguably demonstrate the richness, rigor, and validity of the case study methodology in relation to this study on forgiveness.

In an attempt to dispel these criticisms about case study research methods, Flyvbjerg (2006) provides two arguments supporting case study methodology that I find relevant especially to my study.

First, it is important to the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest level of the learning process and in much theory. Second, cases are important for researchers' own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223)

In my study, I want to learn about the worldview of others and how these views affect relations with others regardless of conflict, but especially when conflict is at the depth of the Israeli-Palestinian regions. As a researcher, I want to learn and *experience* the experiences of those connected to my study. As such, it is a matter of lessening as much distance as possible to the subject matter and the subjects being interviewed. I enter into the case study methodology wishing to learn something rather than proving something and using what I have learned in order to promote, in this case, social justice consciousness. Secondly, learning from others' experiences relates to a pedagogy of forgiveness that I will address more fully in Chapter VI. In this chapter I argue that forgiveness as a behavior can be learned and taught and the premise of the case study methodology supports that notion. The common phenomenon of an expert is one's knowledge through experiences. Flyvbjerg (2006) makes this point, "Context dependent

knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity” (p. 222). On this point, I consider those interviewed to be engaged in expert activity reflecting their view of the world as opposed to how the world is. For me, the researcher, this understanding situates human context to behaviors and a hopefulness that behaviors can change when one’s views change. The case study method provides an understanding of what is possible when human capacities of ethics of forgiveness are recognized and practiced. I argue that this concept of the case study methodology negates the criticism that it holds preconceived notions and a bias towards verification. Flyvbjerg (2006) addressed the criticism of bias in case study research as “demonstrating a lack of knowledge of what is involved in case study research” (p. 234). I agree with this statement as it has been my experience that through my research, I have found a richness in different viewpoints and concepts of forgiveness as it applies to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Flyvbjerg (2006) further supported the case study method with regard to bias toward verification.

. . . case study has its own rigor, different to be sure, but no less strict than the rigor of quantitative methods. The advantage of the case study is that it can “close-in” on real life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice. (p. 235)

The real-life situations of which Flyvbjerg wrote are what this research hoped to discover through the interviews of those who are closely engaged with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its resolution. An argument may be made that interviewees held a bias that the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is due to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territory. However, the goal of my study is not to prove or disprove this concept, but to gain an understanding of how the conflict may be resolved, specifically

through practices of forgiveness. I will address this bias in a later section in which I acknowledge such limitations in my study.

I conclude this section of the methodology chapter with a quote from Soklaridis (2009), a researcher from Ontario, Canada, who wrote on qualitative research and the interview process as it is applicable to my choice of methodology.

The emphasis is on deriving an understanding of how people conceive and construct their lives as meaningful processes, how people interact with one another and interpret those interactions in the context of the social world, and the importance of observation in “natural settings” (as opposed to a laboratory). (p. 720)

While I expect to learn much about forgiveness from the interviewees’ interpretations of their perceptions and experiences, I do not have a preconceived theory of forgiveness in mind with regard to the design and implementation of this case study. At the same time, I recognize that one or more themes might emerge from the data, thereby realizing a potential overlap between my case study methodology and developing theories from the ground. Soklaridis’s (2009) statement directly relates to the learning of one’s worldview that I intended to capture through the voices of those intimately involved with the conflict. Given this intent, I will present my rationale for the content of the interview questions and what I hoped to find.

### **Development of Interview Questions**

As outlined in Chapter I, I developed four foundational research questions that underscore my study and also that provided an understanding of the personal views of those who are actively involved with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I specifically wished

to explore, (a) how each one understands forgiveness and, as a behavior, its role in reconciliation following conflict; (b) the role of human capacities that I have named ethics of forgiveness in moral repair; (c) the relationship between forgiveness and social justice consciousness; and, (d) to find whether or not forgiveness can be taught. Interview questions were developed based on these four areas as a foundation. Standard open-ended interviews were developed, meaning that all participants were asked identical questions, yet worded to allow the interviewee to respond with as much detail as he or she wished and that allowed me, the researcher, to follow up with additional questions. D. Turner (2010) noted, “Standardized open-ended interviews are likely the most popular form of interviewing utilized in research studies because of the nature of the open-ended questions, allowing the participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences” (p. 756). The following is the list of open-ended questions that I specifically created for my interview instrument:

1. Tell me about some key aspects of your worldview, including those social, political, spiritual or moral beliefs that have been important in developing this view.
2. How has the conflict between Israel and Palestine affected your life and beliefs?
3. What aspects of your life have been most affected by this conflict?
4. How do you understand forgiveness?
5. What informs your understanding of forgiveness?

6. I'm curious about your thoughts on forgiveness as they relate to this conflict.  
Please talk to me about that?
7. How has your relationship with those directly affected by the  
Israeli/Palestinian conflict impacted your view of forgiveness?
8. Can you tell me about a time when you forgave someone for a wrongdoing?  
What did you draw on in that process?
9. Discuss a time when someone forgave you? How did your view of that person  
or the wrongdoing change?
10. What are some of the struggles you experience with forgiveness when  
confronting your pain/anger?
11. What human qualities do you (or we) draw on to forgive? How do you view  
those who are responsible for deaths and violence in your country  
(Israel/Palestinian conflict)?
12. How would you define social justice?
13. How do you see forgiveness as impacting reconciliation, healing, or social  
justice consciousness?
14. Can we educate for forgiveness? How?

The open-ended design of the interview questions fit the case study approach as this process allowed for each interviewee to expound on his or her real-life situations that included stated complexities in their experiences with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These complexities included religious beliefs, social justice convictions, political positionalities, and cultural and familial lived experiences that were relevant to their

developed views of the world and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Further, as I learned how these and other experiences impacted interviewees' responses, I also became aware of the effects on my own views and assumptions about the social, cultural and political structures that shape the conflict.

### **Positionality**

As a white Jewish woman living in the U.S., my privilege is defined by my ability to live without fear of being a target of a suicide bomber or being refused services due to my ethnic or religious identification. As a Jew living in a southern U.S. state surrounded by a predominately Christian culture, I encounter misconceptions about being Jewish; however, I do not live in fear of my life or personal harm. Also, I have adopted the Jewish religion as one based on human and animal rights and social justice consciousness and one that actively confronts oppressive practices by those in positions of power. Therefore, I am what researchers Dwyer and Buckle (2009) termed an “insider,” meaning that I am a member of the population being studied, in this study, the Jewish population. As well, because of my commitment to social justice and equality, I also see myself as an “insider” with the Palestinian people in my efforts to bring resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I have tremendous empathy for their longing to live free and peaceful lives. The significance of being an insider as a researcher lies in the need to acknowledge this positionality through self-reflection and paying particular attention to emotional responses to shared experiences that may arise during interactions with interviewees. Dwyer wrote about her experience as an insider and researcher. “As a qualitative researcher I do not think being an insider makes me a better or worse researcher; it just



makes me a different type of researcher” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 56). From Dwyer’s statement and my own experience as an insider researcher, the researcher must acknowledge her biases, power structures and alignments that influence populations being studied whether she is an insider or outsider. For me, it was impossible to deny the emotional responses to the interviewed participants, especially from those who are living in Israel and Palestine and experiencing daily consequences due to the conflict.

Consideration of positionality in social science research has its detractors giving reasons that it may be avoided. Researchers McCorkel and Myers (2003) have written on researchers’ hesitancy to address positionality when conducting ethnographic research.

It may be that sociologists are hesitant to consider the effect of identity on their work because the groundlessness of identity claims threatens to unearth those ghosts we are trained to ritualistically bury at the start of our research projects: bias and subjectivity. (p. 200)

This outlook, then, raises the concern about burying biases and subjectivity and the consequences in analyzed findings. McCorkel and Myers (2003) raised the same concern as they concluded that it is essential in social science research “that the researcher put her taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and stereotypes on the table for dissection” (McCorkel & Myers, 2003, p. 206). This is not always an easy task; however, as researchers engaging with human subjects, we must acknowledge all the human capacities and emotions that cannot be buried. In my study, I am exploring empathy, sympathy, love, trust, benevolence, and those human capacities that connect us to each other. My relationship to the interviewees would not be genuine if I were not willing to

affirm these human capacities with them. We cannot expect to discover conditions of being human without being human.

To affirm the relevance of human capacities within relationships, I return to the issue of vulnerability that I raised in Chapter I and its relation to forgiveness. To simply recap, I posed that forgiveness may signal vulnerability in that there is a risk of unpredictability to future wrongdoing. Conducting research through interviews with people who have positions that differ from my own establishes vulnerability on both the part of the interviewer and the interviewee that needs to be recognized. As a researcher, I must also consider the vulnerability of the interviewee who is asked to reveal information to me as a Jew, an insider, and a researcher. Did they trust that the information I was asking was for purposes of research, or would I use it against their efforts for reconciliation? I did not ask the interviewees how they perceived me or if my being a Jew affected their responses to my questions about the conflict. It did not occur to me to ask nor did I perceive or feel any hesitancy on their part to speak freely regardless of whether the interviewees were Jewish or Muslim. I did state up front to all interviewees that I was Jewish as I felt it was important for each one to know and respond how they wished. This was my way of acknowledging an understanding of vulnerability on my part and allowing for the interviewee to respond with any concerns.

To illustrate, one of my interviews included an Israeli, Ramir, whose daughter had been killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber. As a result, he commits his work to peaceful resolution and reconciliation between the two countries. Ramir introduced me to Bassam, a Palestinian man whom he referred to as his brother and whose daughter was killed by

an Israeli soldier. They worked side-by-side to promote peace among people of both countries. Ramir introduced me to Bassam by humorously writing to him: “I am introducing you to Marcia Weston, a student who is doing research on forgiveness. She is Jewish, but she is okay.” Both Ramir and Bassam stressed to me the importance of regarding the other as human beings with likenesses regardless of cultural or religious roots in order to promote peaceful reconciliation. As such, their working together has exposed a vulnerability for both men within their communities and countries.

Additionally, another interviewee, Gideon (Israeli), did not conduct the interview with the video portion of Skype. I wondered if this was due to the fact that as an outspoken critic of the Israeli government’s practices against the Palestinian people, he was many times under verbal and written attack following publication of his views. His interview preference may have been an issue of personal safety. Overall, the interviews with each participant had a tremendous impact on my positionality.

### **Shifting Positionalities**

I continue to address the importance of positionality through the work of researcher Kusenbach (2002) who pointed out, “Conducting qualitative research, especially fieldwork, has always been a complex and personally transforming enterprise” (p. 149). I was not at all prepared for the complexities, challenges, or the resulting personal transformation. However, the experiences of these interviews resulted in a shift of my assumptions. Prior to this research, I had neither met nor engaged with anyone from Palestine and I felt greater empathy with those from Israeli populations mostly due to the American Jewish alignment with Israel as having a right to exist. This right to exist

came with an understanding that an objective of all Palestinians included denying Israel's right to exist. Although I did not know what to expect through interviews with Palestinian people, I made a conscious effort not to be offensive or let my prejudice show in my interviews. My first interview was with a former Israeli soldier, Avner, who shared personal experiences about the violence of the Israeli army on Palestinian villages and with heartfelt hurt, talked of the conflict he felt when carrying out his duties, yet having a commitment to social justice practices. An unanticipated challenge for me was in reaction to hearing testimony by an Israeli who was criticizing Israeli policies. This criticism was demonstrated through words and live-stream videos that showed the oppressive practices of the Israeli government. Subsequent interviewees challenged my held assumptions that Israel followed social justice practices based on Jewish tenets on its Palestinian neighbors. Having believed that the policies of Israel were necessary in order for Jews to live without fear of annihilation that has been historically imposed, I had not paid attention to the current oppressive practices being carried out by the Israeli government. Additionally, as I shared new information that I was learning about Israel's practices with Jewish family members and friends, I was met with accusations of listening to Palestinian propaganda followed by questions about my loyalty to Israel. As a result, I felt isolation and apprehension of moving forward and became hesitant to discuss my newfound knowledge with those who either rejected my thoughts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or those who found my opinions to be evidence that Israeli government policies were to blame for the violence and conflict. These experiences increased my feelings of empathy

for those who were taking risks in standing up against powerful forces that were responsible for oppressive practices.

As my journey continued, my positionalities were challenged. This challenge can be better understood through a quote by Peshkin (1988) who wrote on researchers' subjectivity. "Whatever the substance of one's persuasions at a given point, one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life" (p. 17). Regardless of whether or not one's positionality shifts or remains the same throughout the research project, personal responses to such in-depth work especially in engagement with another must be acknowledged and considered as relevant to data as they are analyzed and used in study findings.

### **Methods**

The setting and context chosen to complement this study was directly connected to the problem and statement of purpose as outlined in Chapter I. To recap, the problem as the basis of this study was to explore forgiveness as a behavior as opposed to an emotional response to a perceived wrongdoing. I chose the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the context for exploring forgiveness as a behavior and, therefore, chose to conduct interviews with people who are intimately involved with the conflict, some of whom live in both Israel and the Palestine territories. Interviews with those participants who resided outside of North Carolina were conducted through Skype while those in my geographic area were conducted face-to-face. One interview was conducted by telephone and one

conducted through Face Time. All interviews, regardless of venue, were digitally recorded with permission.

My preference of Skype and face-to-face interviews was in keeping with what I termed the essence of humanism—being able to see the face of the other—as I noted in the beginning of Chapter I. Throughout this study I have emphasized the importance of seeing each other as humans with human qualities that affirm our likenesses rather than our differences. As such, it was a priority to me that I see the face of the interviewee and the interviewee see my face. As researcher, Seitz (2016) stated, “Sitting down with someone face-to-face can create a personal connection and allow the researcher to read important nonverbal cues” (p. 229). Seitz (2016) added, “The rise of video-based software applications, like Skype, offers some exciting possibilities for qualitative interviewing” (p. 230). There are drawbacks to using a program such as Skype that include pauses in needed internet connections or the inability to see the entire person during the interview. With these drawbacks, I considered the Skype venue as more valuable than telephone or paper surveys.

Additionally, in keeping with the Social and Political Contexts section of Chapter I where I address challenges to forgiveness, I considered the face-to-face interview, including through Skype, as providing opportunities for greater in-depth exploration of these challenges. My hope was that all five challenges, (a) the individual’s view of the world; (b) the effects of historical trauma; (c) forgiveness viewed as a weakness; (d) forgiveness as an abstract concept; and (e) forgiveness as powerless to effect political change, would be addressed by interviewees in context within the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. The ability to see facial expressions provided a greater holistic context to the interviews especially as many experiences shared elicited a range of emotions.

### **Research Sampling and Data Sources**

I chose interviewees based on the relationship each one had to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My goal has been to identify representative samples of a population that are intimately engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through their intimate engagement, I wanted to draw some conclusions about the role of forgiveness in a long-embedded and violent conflict between Israel and the Palestinian territories. Researchers Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015), providing a critical analysis on sampling, defined sample as “the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (p. 1775). Thus, sampling specific to the case study methodology provides an understanding of the case being studied, or in this research, forgiveness as a behavior that leads to moral repair among people, local communities, and the global community. The research of the above-named authors was instrumental in providing me with an understanding of sampling, especially in the case study methodology, and in the development of creating criteria in interviewee selection. In an attempt to find definitive definitions of purposeful sampling, Gentles et al. (2015) found “inconsistencies and ambiguities in the definitions for specific purposeful sampling strategies” (p. 1779). This conclusion does not mean that sampling does not serve a purpose. Several of the authors included in their study, maintain that sampling, especially within a case study method, needed to be based on the depth and richness of information that addressed the research problem. I found this arbitrariness in definition of purposeful

sampling to be a positive influence that allowed me as a researcher to have flexibility in choosing my sample population. Given this, I selected interviewees based on their anticipated contributions that would lead to an understanding of concepts of ethics of forgiveness and how they may influence solutions for reconciliation and moral repair. I am aware there is only one female in my interviewees of 12 participants. I reached out to several women who were engaged in peace activities; however, they were not available for interviews. I do not know whether or not their perspectives would have provided different results, but I would argue that inclusion of women's voices should be a priority in further research. Through my sample, I intended to get as close as possible to actual lived experiences in order to gain a theoretical understanding of how forgiveness is perceived by those engaged with the conflict. As such, I developed criteria for those interviewed that would purposefully contribute to the relevance of the study's addressed problem. Those criteria included several areas such as experiencing a personal loss as the result of the conflict and/or being actively engaged with reconciliation efforts through various venues such as speaking engagements, writings, teaching, and other activities that expose oppressive political policies that will lead to social justice practices.

**Sampling size.** The size of my sample was determined through consideration of the number of people interviewed that would provide a richness of information that could contribute to my study. Again, I found the literature on sample size to vary and, unlike quantitative methods, not as easily measurable. For case study methods, various researchers suggested sampling sizes from 10 to 15 participants or four cases to be within an appropriate range (Gentles et al., 2015, Table 3, p. 1783).



I contacted 15 prospective interviewees and interviewed 12 of those, with 12 being within the established number criterion. Four interviewees were Israeli and living in Israel; four were Palestinian, three living in Palestine and one living in the United States; and, four were citizens of the United States who were actively engaged with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Two Israeli interviewees had lost children in the conflict and one Palestinian had lost a child in the conflict. One Palestinian interviewee was living in the Gaza Strip with little access to electricity and internet service. All interviewees were engaged in exposing the oppressive practices of Israel towards the Palestinian people through writings, testimonies, videos, blogs, and international speaking engagements.

**Sample identification.** Those interviewed were initially identified through the Parents' Circle, Family forum, a grassroots organization that brings together bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost family members as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are actively working towards reconciliation. The organization provided me with names of both Israelis and Palestinians who were members of the organization and actively involved in conflict resolution. From these interviews, other prospective interviewees were recommended as those who may contribute to my study and here is where the concept of "snowball" sampling applied to the identification of interviewees.

**Snowball sampling.** The work of Noy (2008) introduces the role of snowball sampling in qualitative research methods. He wrote: "A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (p. 330). The metaphor of the snowball

is appropriate to my study as I learned of prospective interviewees through others whom I had interviewed. One of the nuances of snowball sampling is its focus on obtaining information on “hidden populations” (2008, p. 330) or marginalized populations that are not or do not want to be in the mainstream. For my study, I interviewed people who were working against oppressive political power structures that were being supported and reinforced by local and international governments. In other words, for those interviewees living in Israel and Palestine, their work put them in jeopardy of facing personal consequences that would cause further oppression or even imprisonment. I saw this ongoing sense of danger in their work to add strength in commitment and belief that change could be brought about by peaceful resolution. Noy (2008) provided additional commentary on snowball sampling, “When employed in the study of social systems and networks, this sampling method delivers a unique *type of knowledge*” (p. 331). My study is looking at social knowledge that drives social change through human interactions and human capacities, specifically through behaviors of forgiveness. My argument that forgiveness is part of human construct makes social knowledge a key ingredient to this study. As such, I wanted to understand the social networks that were constantly in flux and open to change through social action efforts based on a human essence of being with the other.

In contrast, I acknowledge consequences of snowball sampling within my methodological process. First, the referrals I received from interviewees were for the most part to those who held the same beliefs and political views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These beliefs and political views included, (a) the main cause of the conflict

(occupation of Palestinian territories); (b) the intentional oppression of Palestinian populations by the Israeli government; (c) the United States' contributions to these oppressive practices; and, (d) the strategies that instilled fear in the general population of both Israelis and Palestinians. Secondly, I questioned if the intent of those who agreed to be interviewed was to encourage me, as a United States citizen and a Jewish person, to use persuasion to change U.S. policy towards Israel and recognize the country's oppressive practices. One Israeli interviewee asked that I join the effort to stop U.S. unconditional support of Israel.

Whether or not these two consequential issues deflected from gaining an in-depth understanding of the interviewee's concept of forgiveness is not clear and I will further address these issues in the limitations and delimitations section.

**Ethical considerations.** I followed procedures of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as set forth by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in order to protect the rights of each interview participant. I was granted IRB approval on September 16, 2015 and requested that interviewees sign a consent form required for participation. Two interviewees were not able to print, sign, and scan the consent form due to lack of adequate resources, and a modification was submitted and approved by IRB with a waiver of signed consent for the two interviewees. Additionally, all interviewees were asked permission to use their names and permission was granted. However, as researcher, I elected to use first names only (with one exception) as an additional protection even though all of those interviewed were engaged in public speaking and writing. The one exception was Rabbi Michael Lerner, whose writings were used throughout my

dissertation. Interviewees were also informed that the interviews were being digitally recorded and would be transcribed.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Interviews began in October of 2015 and 12 were completed in February of 2016. One prospective interviewee declined due to a recent death in the family. Data were collected through the interviews that were held through Skype, face-to-face, and telephone venues. All interviews were digitally recorded and were transcribed by an outside party. Full names were not disclosed in the recordings. Upon receipt of the transcripts, identifying data such as last name, affiliation, and date of interview were added in preparation for coding. All transcribed interviews were filed in a locked file cabinet used only for coding and referencing during the writing.

As previously stated, three of the four Israeli interviewees and three of the four Palestinian interviewees were living in Israel and Palestine respectively. Considerations for a seven-hour time difference had to be made as well as avoiding the Sabbath hours of sundown Friday evenings through sundown on Saturdays. Interview schedules were set at least two weeks prior to the interview and some had to be rescheduled due to conflicts in speaking engagements, interviewee travel, etc. I have separated the three groups of interviews according to geography and represented populations.

- Israeli interviewees

Rami – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded. The interview took place on October 15, 2015 at midnight Israeli time and 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time in the U.S. Rami was in his home office.

Avner – the interview took place via Facetime and was digitally recorded.

Avner was in his apartment in New York City as he is a graduate student in that city. The interview took place on October 15, 2015 at 10:00 AM. I also met Avner when he spoke on Israeli-Palestinian relations at an event in Greensboro, NC in November of 2015.

Yitzhak – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded.

Yitzhak was at his home office and the interview was held on October 18, 2015 at 12:00 PM Israeli time and 6:00 AM Eastern Standard Time in the U.S.

Gideon – the interview took place via Skype; however, Gideon elected to use voice only and not the camera. The interview was digitally recorded and held on January 17, 2016 at 5:00 PM Israeli time and 10:00 AM Eastern Standard Time in the U.S. I do not know where Gideon was at the time of the interview that took place.

- Palestinian interviewees

Bassam – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded.

Bassam was at his home during the interview, which took place on October 18, 2016 at 3:00 PM Palestinian time and 8:00 AM Eastern Standard Time in the U.S.

Maha – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded. Maha was at her sister's as Maha's electricity is not reliable due to being shut off periodically without warning. The interview took place on November 27,

2015 at 6:00 PM Palestinian time and 12:00 PM Eastern Standard Time in the U.S.

Sa'ed – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded. Sa'ed was at his current home in the U.S. The interview took place on January 2, 2016 at 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time.

Sam – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded. Sam has two homes, one in the U.S. and one in Palestine. He was at his home in the U.S. for the interview, which took place on November 22, 2015 at 10:00 AM Central Standard Time and 11:00 AM Eastern Standard Time.

- U.S. interviewees

Rabbi Michael – the interview took place via Skype and was digitally recorded. Rabbi Michael was in his home office in the U.S. during the interview on December 27, 2015 at 11:00 AM Pacific Standard Time and 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time.

Daniel – the interview was face-to-face and took place in Daniel's office at work on December 23, 2015 at 4:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. The interview was digitally recorded.

Max – the interview was face-to-face and took place in Max's office at work on December 8, 2015 at 2:30 PM Eastern Standard Time. The interview was digitally recorded.

Steve – the interview was by telephone and was digitally recorded. The interview took place on December 1, 2016 at 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time.

## Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected through interviews, I set up an Excel Spread sheet that included the following columns:

### Under Tab 1

Permission to use name  
Interviewee  
Affiliation  
Preliminary codes  
Quotes  
Final codes  
Themes/individual  
Themes/collective

### Under Tab 2

Interviewee  
Organization  
Organization description  
Relationship to conflict  
Additional notes  
Supporting resources

Through this process of recording and coding, I was able to identify themes within each interview and collective themes that gave broad findings. Once the interviews were transcribed, I read through each one to determine the best way to code the data and analyze the research. As I interviewed each person, certain themes arose. However, as I read the transcripts I saw things that I had missed or forgotten from the actual interview process. I was so intent on making sure that my questions were understood, and forming follow up questions depending on responses, that I had overlooked rich content.

Returning to the transcribed interviews allowed me to recapture much of the overlooked content. As well, much of the interview content generated deep emotional reactions in me, which may have altered my perceptions of some of the content. Reading and rereading the transcripts was important and helped me to recapture and have a clearer view of relevant interview data. Given these conditions, in order to capture as much rich data as possible, I used the described process to code in order to organize the interviews into

categories that would help me to find themes and concepts within each individual interview followed by collective themes and concepts. Through this organizational method, I was able to see a progression of interview material that allowed me to funnel or filter verbal data to find meanings and patterns (see Tables 1 and 2).

**Data categories.** I used the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) who wrote on thematic analysis, “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). This definition captured the essence of my intent to use the data from the interviews in a way that would address my study’s topic, which is to explore forgiveness and those human capacities of ethics of forgiveness that are essential to moral repair in community and global relationships. On this same topic, Braun and Clarke (2006) point out,

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. (p. 81)

The creation of the coding headings was based on my desire to present in the best way possible the realities of experiences and meanings that were told to me through the interviews. My understanding of thematic analysis was used in the last three columns (final codes, individual themes and collective themes) in hopes of capturing pattern responses and meanings from the data. I included a column for quotes that, through the voices of participants, reinforced the themes and patterns that I found.



Table 1

## Coding the Interviews

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Prelim Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes: Individual	Themes: Collective
Yes	Avner	Israeli <i>Breaking the Silence</i>	Former Israeli soldier exposing Israel's oppression of Palestinians	"My personal experience has pushed me to ask questions"	Awareness of others	Development of humanitarian worldview	Ending occupation of Palestine territories by Israel
			Forgiveness is only at the end	"Forgiveness is external to us"			
			Feeling empathy means feeling secure	"You have to feel secure to feel empathetic"	Empathy reserved for the elite	Oppressed cannot be expected to feel empathy	Empathy essential to humanism

Table 2

## Secondary Coding

Interviewee	Organization	Organization description/history	Organization's relationship to conflict	Notes	Resources
Avner	<i>Breaking the Silence</i> ; www.breakingthesilence.org	Former Israeli soldiers who exposed the consequences of army tactics; started in 2004	Stimulate public debate on political policies of Israel	Student getting masters in peace and conflict studies	Breaking the Silence videos, articles, and ongoing newsletter

I also found it important in the data collection to include more information on the affiliation of each of the interviewees as their affiliation was a focal point of their active engagement with the conflict. For these data, I created a second chart to reflect secondary data information that was related to the interviews and would be part of my findings. I used a second coding process to include the political activity of each interviewee and supporting resources such as videos and readings that were provided (see Table 2). Both sets of coding will be used in the findings and analysis in Chapters IV and V.

### **Trustworthiness**

Throughout my research, I have found that issues of validity within qualitative research methods have their detractors that argue for the use of the validity of positivistic, quantitative research methods. Altheide and Johnson (1994) addressed this issue of interpretive validity.

The traditional criteria of methodological adequacy and validity were formulated and essentially “owned” by positivism, the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological perspective that has justified the use of quantitative methods in the social sciences for most of the twentieth century. (p. 487)

Given this stand, my intention to be transparent in my choice of prior research was a priority that included detailed descriptions of the study’s purpose, my personal bias, and interpretations of narratives collected from my interviewees in order to ensure the validity of my work. I realize that various audiences will determine validity according to his or her point of view, frame of reference, ideology, and sources of knowledge that make validity problematic.

I address the issue of validity of qualitative research through work of Creswell and Miller (2000) who have developed a framework with which researchers identify appropriate choice of validity procedures. The framework combines the need for assessment of the study's credibility (interpretation of the data) and the researcher's perspective of qualitative research, bringing together key elements of qualitative research findings. Creswell and Miller (2000) define the "lens of the researcher" as "the viewpoint for establishing validity" (p. 125). In my study, I also include the lens of the participants in establishing a validity of each one's worldview interpretation. As these researchers wrote, "The qualitative paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and it is what participants perceive it to be" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125).

To continue, Creswell and Miller (2000) introduce three paradigm assumptions that include postpositivist, constructivist or interpretive, and critical perspective. All three are within the framework of qualitative inquiry and I find pieces of the three in my work. I believe that my study most closely aligns with the critical perspective in that I disclose my biases and reactions to findings. The critical perspective also accounts for a multitude of influences that include political, cultural, and in this case, religious influences within the research itself. Within these three paradigm assumptions are validity procedures that determine credibility of the study. Without going through each procedure, I am choosing those procedures that fit my study and reinforce valid procedures.

### **Validity Procedures**

As stated above, I have acknowledged my biases, assumptions and beliefs throughout my study, which Creswell and Miller (2000) term "researcher reflexivity" (p.

127) as a process of researcher self-disclosure that determine biases. I have also described the participants, settings, and affiliations with in-depth detail that the authors describe as important in establishing credibility. The descriptions of the interviewees and their role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict create a vision of real situations that this study has attempted to raise. Lastly, I have brought together multiple perspectives of those who are directly and indirectly involved with the conflict through rigorous and forthcoming ways to help us to understand through a human lens the expansiveness of this conflict and the role that practices of forgiveness may play in its reconciliation.

Lastly, in emphasizing transparency, as a white Jewish woman who strongly advocates for the existence of the State of Israel, it was impossible for me to deny any bias within my study. Given this stance, my biases were acknowledged throughout this research in order to create an understanding to the reader. As researchers Amis and Silk (2008) point out, “Our backgrounds have inevitably shaped the approaches we take to our work, philosophically, methodologically, and presentationally” (p. 458). I am as firmly committed also to social justice and amelioration of oppressive practices against any population and I am not blinded by the fact that my ties to Judaism and Israel create conflict within me. I do not consider my biases to diminish the validity of this work, but to add a dimension of consideration to its purpose.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

#### **Limitations**

Forgiveness, as presented, is a complex and many times nebulous concept and holds personal and various meanings for people. Focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict limits an understanding of forgiveness in the general population, especially with emphasis on moral relations and social justice consciousness. The depth of this struggle and the many challenges that implementation of forgiveness faces within this conflict, poses a problem to understanding the breadth and power the practice of forgiveness may hold. To fully understand the possibilities for forgiveness taking on a broader definition and its impact on creating moral relations and social justice consciousness between people and among communities that do not have the historical trauma as experienced by Israelis and Palestinians, warrants additional study and research. I am hopeful that this study will provide practical ways of restoring hope for reconciliation among those living in daily conflict and tragedy. As such, I have addressed areas of weakness in the scope of this study:

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only one focus area with which to critically consider forgiveness as a behavior that will create moral repair. This is a conflict between nations and has its international supporters and detractors that take sides instead of working towards reconciliation. A focus on this conflict limits the breadth and depth of the role that practices of forgiveness can play in moral repair between people and among communities.
- Concepts and definitions of forgiveness are based on cultural and religious teachings that have defined forgiveness as a practice that follows a wrongdoing. This study is exploring another aspect of forgiveness that can be practiced before a wrongdoing occurs. As such, I introduced ethics of forgiveness as human capacities that consider others through a humanistic lens

based on moral relations that, when practiced, create greater possibilities of understanding and moral repair when wrongdoings do occur. Changing long-held beliefs about forgiveness requires more than a suggestion of redefinition.

- Although I was able to interview most participants through Skype, I would have preferred to be in the physical presence of all interviewees to make observations through conversations. Separated by a computer or even a table, creates a barrier for fully engaging with the other, which diminishes a richness of human interaction.

### **Delimitations**

I purposely did not include anyone under the age of 18 years in my interview pool mainly due to the restrictions of the IRB process and the geographic distance that would have been involved in seeking permission. In the future, I would consider including the voices of young people as their perspectives provide a lens into future possibilities for moral repair between Israel and Palestine.

The study's interviewees did not include anyone who did not support peaceful reconciliation between the two countries. I did not interview anyone who justifies Israeli's occupation of Palestinian homes nor anyone who publicly denounces Israel's right to exist as a country or those who justify violence on either side. By including those described here, my scope of study and the study's problem that I address would be greatly altered.

I do believe that both the limitations and delimitations that I have addressed can be included in future studies. The conceptual framework is certainly transferable to

further studies on forgiveness as a behavior rather than an emotional response to wrongdoing that is necessary to create social justice consciousness.

### **Chapter Summary**

To address forgiveness as a practiced behavior rather than an emotional response following a wrongdoing, I chose to interview people who were actively engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and working for peaceful resolution. I wanted to know how they defined forgiveness and what role, if any, they considered to be important aspects of their work towards reconciliation. I purposely chose people from both countries as well as those outside of the country, yet who were equally engaged, in order to determine if there were differences in causes and solutions. I designed my interview questions to not only focus on the conflict, but to determine their worldviews of humanity, and prospects for instilling social justice consciousness through ethics of forgiveness.

I designed my coding method keeping in mind the criticisms of the validity of qualitative research by using a funnel-based process for extracting themes that were found throughout the interview process. This process reflects a transparency as to the themes that were found through actual quotes in response to the interview questions. All interviewees were included in my coding sheet that allowed for comparisons in responses among all interviewees. I also included their affiliations as relevant to their engagement in peaceful reconciliation that provided greater understanding of each one's frame of reference.

Equally important, I addressed my biases as a researcher that influences interpretation and meaning in order to provide clarity to the reader. These biases include



my being Jewish, my privilege as a white woman, and my commitment to peaceful reconciliation between Israel and Palestine that aligns with the work of the interviewees.

In Chapter IV I present my findings from the interview data that were collected and analyzed. The findings in the findings chapter contribute to the foundation for the conclusions and recommendations that this study addresses.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SPEAKING ABOUT FORGIVENESS IN RELATION TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

#### **Introduction**

Through collecting narratives from those who live amongst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on a daily basis, and from those who have committed themselves to active engagement in reconciliation efforts, I will aim to provide illustrations of practical applications and perspectives of forgiveness as communicated by study participants. To restate the study problem—conventional understandings of forgiveness as an emotional response to perceived wrongdoing as opposed to behaviors that embrace moral relationships—I wanted to determine if or how theoretical concepts of forgiveness are applicable to actual behaviors of individuals based on their lived experiences, especially as applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, based on the theories, research questions, and design that underscore this study's conceptual framework, I have selected the qualitative interview as my primary data collection instrument. As such, I have selected a study sample that includes individuals from Israel, Palestine, and the United States, all having various perspectives on forgiveness that encompass social, political, religious, or a combination of all three constructs.

I now follow with a restatement of the research questions in order to reinforce the connection between the study findings and the foundation of this study as represented by these questions.

1. What are the problems and challenges associated with the practice of forgiveness understood as human capacities and chosen behaviors, in the context of interpersonal relations, cultural identities and practices, and broader social conflicts and violence?
2. What role do ethics of forgiveness play in the repair of wrongdoing that has broken moral relations?
3. What is the relationship between social justice consciousness and the practice of forgiveness?
4. Can forgiveness be taught, and if so, how?

These questions will drive the discovery of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

To lay the groundwork for the chapter's in-depth discussion of the five themes and findings that resulted from this study, I will provide a brief overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and include my rationale for choosing the conflict as my focus to forgiveness. I will follow with introductions of the study participants, providing a brief description of each relative to his or her national/cultural background and engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In this section, I am drawing from the book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine, A strategy to heal and transform the Middle East*, by Rabbi Michael Lerner (2012), who offers in-depth insight into the historical roots of the conflict and its continued existence.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rooted in histories that include fear, misconceptions, ignorance about others, realities of violence and oppression, religious discrimination, racism, imperialism, abuse of power and other horrific experiences that

have left imprints of each one's wish for the demise of the other. It is not illogical to find imperialism at the core of this conflict and as a causal factor in its continuation today.

In the early 1900s, following World War I, Britain's desire to control the oil reserves of the Arab world, strategically aligned itself with Jews by declaring that Jews have their own state in their homeland, which is now the State of Israel. Britain thought that if they befriended Jews by providing them with a homeland, Jews would repay Britain through access to oil. The Arab population considered this declaration and subsequent Zionist movement (Zionism is a movement with the goal of the return of Jews to the land of Israel) to be an invasion of Arab land by imperialistic powers. Additionally, the increase of anti-Semitism sentiment and practices in Europe and around the world brought thousands of Jewish people escaping oppression into a new "homeland" where Arab land was acquired (there is considerable controversy over whether or not the land was legitimately purchased or taken). Jewish settlers considered themselves as finding a homeland while Palestinians considered the waves of Jewish immigrants as an invasion. The commodity of land acquisition defined the relationship between people instead of basing relationships on humanitarian foundations of well-being. As happens with power and dominance, responses of violence and hatred between the two cultures became embedded as a way to exist with each other. Both sides have not taken the responsibility to understand the perceptions of the other and have responded to each other in mistrust and violence. As a result, both sides justify their anger and violent and oppressive acts as those that are in *defense* of each one's continued existence. Rabbi Lerner (2012) conveyed a similar sentiment of mutual respect in his book.

I am telling this story in a way that attempts to show that this outcome was a product not of evil intentions, but of the way each side perceived and defined its reality and the way each side ignored the needs and legitimate concerns of the other.

As the Jewish population increased in Israel, the tensions between Arabs and Jews continued to grow and become more intense and violent in actions against the other. In the 1940s and 1950s anti-Semitism increased in Arab countries through literature that demeaned Jews. Arabs “integrated former Nazi scientists and operatives into their defense and intelligence systems” (Lerner, 2012, p. 140), which also contributed to anti-Semitism practices. This wave of anti-Semitism increased the flight of Jews in Arab countries to the State of Israel and as the Jewish population grew, so did power structures of military rule that resulted in discrimination practices in housing and employment for many Palestinians.

The economic and political support to Israel by the United States fueled fears of “Western expansionism” (p. 148). In the spring of 1967, Egypt began broadcasting messages about “pushing the Jews into the sea” (p. 148), which instilled a fear of another Holocaust for the State of Israel. The State of Israel determined that Jewish history would not be repeated (this history included nations sitting silent while Jews faced destruction) launched a preemptive military strike against Egypt and Syria in the spring of 1967, which is now referred to as the Six Day War. This war, in which Palestinians were not involved, led to the conquering of the West Bank, which Israel now governs.

The United States provided arms to Israel as an ally to fight global communism, which were used in the 1973 strike against Israel by Egypt. Following much destruction

due to this attack, an agreement was made between Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat in 1977, returning the Sinai desert to Egypt and the agreement for a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. This peace agreement, however, did not quell the condemnation of Zionism by Arab countries, which again demonstrated, in the eyes of the Jewish people, with intent to destroy them. In a gesture of reconciliation, Arab countries have reached out to Israel to offer peace and security and ask that Israel re-draw borders in order for Palestinians to control their own lands. To this day, Israel has not responded.

Both Israel and Palestine have seen political leaders and organizations that have not been able to secure peaceful resolution that included the ending of the occupation of Palestinian territory. Palestinian activists following the 1967 war formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yassir Arafat. At the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir denied the existence of a Palestinian people. As Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories grew in the 1980s and 1990s and Israel ignored Palestinian demands for self-governing, the First Intifada in 1988 (Palestinian uprising) occurred as a defense to the occupation.

There became a glimmer of hope for peace through the 1993 Oslo Accords led by new Israeli and Palestinian leaders where hope for recognition of each other's humanitarian interests could bring an end to decades of conflict. Unfortunately, powerful self-interests of leaders and leadership organizations toppled what could have resulted in a building of trust, social justice practices and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. As a result, a return to oppressive practices at the hands of leadership was supported. Israel and Palestinian leaders "sought to placate the most extremist elements"

(Lerner, 2012, p. 180) of organizations within their countries, which led to the downfall of any peaceful resolution.

The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, by an Orthodox Jew in 1995 halted any attempts to continue the work of the Oslo Accords and also opened the door for new Israeli leadership, Shimon Peres, who had no interest in ending the occupation and was more interested in vengeance than peace. On the other side, the Palestinian organization, Hamas, did not want to work towards a peaceful process with Israel.

Through the years, attempts of U.S. presidents have been made and what initially looked like successes have returned to oppressive and violent practices. Both peace movements and acts of violence against Israeli and Palestinian civilians have grown and the peace movements have not been able to infiltrate their cries for humanitarian treatment of one another into the mindset of leaders who are intent on oppressive and destructive practices. One may question how Israelis with their history of mistreatment cannot have empathy for those they mistreat. The same question may be asked of the Palestinians who have experienced mistreatment throughout the Middle East. These are the questions that I explore through this study of forgiveness, especially through the voices of those who are trying to bring a sensibility to their actions and get in touch with the very humanism that causes fear and tears at the violence and loss of loved ones. As any resolution to this conflict appears to be impossible, I want to believe that there is hope that years of living in conflict can change direction.

I chose to focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for several reasons. First, as an American Jew I had the need to sort out how a population having religious roots embedded in humanism and attention to the ethical treatment of animals could justify violence against other humans, even as conceived of as defensive acts. Secondly, the depth of emotions that this conflict keeps alive, on both sides, mitigates any notion of a mere apology, but tests the concept of forgiveness (which, is a tenet of both Judaism and Islam religions) in all of its understandings—religious, social, philosophical, moral dimensions. My third reason has to do with my commitment to social justice that is not simply a movement taken up by a fringe of activists, but a way of living afforded to all humans—living in peaceful coexistence that allows all to pursue the quality of life chosen.

I do not consider that forgiveness will wipe away years of anger and hurt that lead to current immoral behaviors of killing and oppression caused by fear and retribution, but an exploration of the complexities and power of forgiveness may trump the current blindness to reasoning. Through this study on forgiveness I hope to learn from those who are living the conflict and those working side-by-side with Israelis and Palestinians, to find pathways to end the conflict in order for the two populations to share a land where their histories began.

### **Introduction of the Participants**

The following descriptions of the 12 study participants are organized according to each individual's stated national identity.



### Israeli Interviewees

Avner is a former Israeli soldier who is a member of an organization, *Breaking the Silence*, that exposes everyday life in the occupied territories of Palestine. Avner is from an Orthodox Jewish family where his father and brother also served in the Israeli army. He served as a paratrooper in the Israeli army and became aware of the oppressive practices by Israel during his military experience. He joined with other former Israeli soldiers through *Breaking the Silence* to stimulate public debate on the effects of the occupation on the Palestinian people. Avner is currently a graduate student studying Peace and Conflict Studies at a college in the United States. He lectures extensively throughout the United States about the realities of the conflict and provided me with videos and a Facebook page that shows *Breaking the Silence* activities.

Rami, the son of a Holocaust survivor, is a peace activist and is a member of the Bereaved Parents' Circle/Family Forum, a joint Palestinian-Israeli organization of over 600 families who have lost close family members in the longstanding conflict. Families work together toward reconciliation efforts in order to achieve sustainable peace between families, communities and nations. Rami's young daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber in September of 1997 and he, along with Bassam (also interviewed) work side-by-side to promote reconciliation efforts.

Yitzhak founded of the Parents' Circle/Family Forum in 1995 following his son's abduction and murder by Hamas, a political structure inside Palestinian territories, in 1994. He is also the founder and executive director of the Arik Institute of Reconciliation, Tolerance, and Peace that was named after his son. Yitzhak's work is prominent among

political dignitaries and escorted former Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. He was also chosen to manage the American “Fund for Reconciliation, Tolerance, and Peace” by donor and American songwriter, Leonard Cohen. Following our interview, Yitzhak requested that I join peace and reconciliation efforts in the United States by sharing information I have found through this study.

Gideon is an activist, public speaker, and columnist for “Haaretz,” Israel’s oldest daily newspaper. Gideon was raised in a Jewish home, however, came to understand the Israeli occupation as violence against Palestinians while reporting for “Haaretz.” His writings exposing Israeli violence against Palestinians have resulted in several death threats, but also have won him awards for peace and reconciliation efforts.

### **Palestinian Interviewees**

Bassam works closely with Rami (above) in peace and reconciliation efforts through the Parents’ Forum/Family Circle organization. Bassam was put into an Israeli prison at age 17 for demonstrating for Palestinian rights and although a victim of polio with limited mobility, he was beaten regularly by Israeli guards. While in prison he was shown the film, “Schindler’s List” and came to see his captors and all Israelis and Palestinians as human beings who have suffered great personal trauma. Bassam’s 10-year-old daughter was killed by an Israeli soldier in 2007 as she was standing outside her school waiting for Bassam to pick her up. Bassam received his Master’s in Holocaust Studies from Bradford University in the United Kingdom.

Sa’ed is a gay Palestinian man who grew up in the occupied territories. He is currently a professor of Peace and Conflict studies at Swathmore College, a Quaker

College in Pennsylvania. He graduated from Harvard with a PhD and has taught courses on Middle East conflicts, nonviolent solutions, and gender and sexuality rights in the Middle East. He has won multiple awards for peaceful resolution efforts between Israel and Palestine and has also been publicly criticized as promoting the destruction of Israel. In December of 2015 while attempting to visit his family for Christmas in the Gaza Strip, Sa'ed was denied entry and put into an Israel jail, where he was eventually sent back to the United States.

Maha is a peace activist living in the Gaza Strip. Holding this interview was difficult as Israel regularly turns off access to electricity for hours at a time with no warning. Although Maha speaks in the United States and recently spoke at the J Street Conference in Washington, DC., a forum for strategizing peace efforts in the Middle East. Maha's daily life is surrounded by the occupation and needs permission to leave Gaza Strip to travel. She is responsible for the healthcare needs of her mother and a nephew and is regularly denied access to medical facilities outside of Gaza Strip.

Sam is a Palestinian-American who lives with his family in Ramallah, Palestinian territory in the West Bank. Sam is an entrepreneur and consultant to a Palestinian communications company. He works with several organizations to halt the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. He founded the newsletter, "e-Palestine.com" where he posts eyewitness news and commentary about the occupation from Palestinian and American vantage points. He criticizes the United States government for years of unqualified support of Israeli through military and economic aid that continues to be used to oppress Palestinian citizens.

### **U.S. Interviewees**

Rabbi Michael is an author who writes extensively on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and reconciliation efforts. His most notable books include, “Embracing Israel/Palestine: A strategy to heal and transform the Middle East,” a publication from which I reference in my study. He is also the editor of “Tikkun,” a magazine dedicated to healing the world, hence, “Tikkun Olam.” Rabbi Michael also leads a Jewish Renewal synagogue in the San Francisco, CA Bay area. The magazine provides a forum for peace activism that includes moral repair of Israeli and Palestinian countries.

Max is the “recently retired William R. Rogers Director of Friends Center and Quaker Studies” and professor of Religious Studies at Guilford College, a small liberal arts college in Greensboro, NC that is guided by Quaker heritage. Max is also the Director of Friends Center in Greensboro and dedicates his work to ensuring inclusivity of religious beliefs through open dialogue and exploration. Max leads trips for students and adults to Israel and Palestine to expose people to all aspects of the conflict. Max has been instrumental in putting my study design sample together by connecting me with participants who have been included in this study.

Daniel is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Director of Undergraduate and Social Work Programs. Daniel has traveled to Palestine to engage in peace work and has also traveled to Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia worked with Buddhist refugees to study conflict resolution among communities and countries. He is most interested in social work practices in these countries and how they promote peace and reconciliation efforts. He creates classroom

environments that encourage his students to become informed engage in critical thinking processes to create healthy communities of well-being.

Steve is Jewish and a dermatologist practicing in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He is a peace activist and lecturer on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict promoting awareness of the oppressive practices of Israel against the Palestinian people. Steve is the creator and director of PromisedLandMuseum.com, an on-line Jewish museum of the Palestine experience. which provides a Jewish perspective of the conflict. His work emphasizes Jewish values of treating others with the respect and human dignity with which we all want to be treated. The museum has been featured at a National Press Club reception in the spring of 2016.

With these introductions in place, I now follow with a presentation of the findings as they have emerged from the interviews. To recap, most interviews were held through Skype (Rami, Bassam, Sa'ed, Yitzhak, Rabbi Michael, and Sam), an on-line venue that allows face-to-face contact in real time; Skype with audio only (Maha and Gideon); Facetime (Avner), a similar on-line venue using I-Phone; face-to-face interviews (Max and Daniel); and, telephone interviews (Steve). The venue depended on access to internet, geographic location, and schedules.

### **Themes**

The following findings are organized by themes that came from the interviews that add a richness to an understanding of forgiveness and how, as a behavior, forgiveness, as a human condition, influences social justice consciousness and moral repair among us.

I have identified five themes that arose from the interviews, four of which are addressed in the findings. I will address the fifth theme, pedagogy of forgiveness, in a separate chapter, Chapter VI, because of its significance to this study. All themes have direct relationship to the problem statement, challenges, and my research questions as these themes are all aspects of forgiveness as they relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The identified themes include: (a) forgiveness as a humanistic behavior; (b) power, politics, and responsibility; (c) the legacy of historical trauma; (d) justice, equality, and forgiveness; and, (e) pedagogy of forgiveness. Some of the themes will include subthemes that will be identified.

Prior to introducing the specific findings, I will present overarching considerations about forgiveness made by interviewees that provide foundational perspectives on forgiveness from their responses. As I asked each one to explain his or her concept of forgiveness, many asked: “What do you mean by forgiveness?” suggesting that possibly I had a concrete definition and was looking for a single answer. My response to this question was, “I don’t know, that is what I am trying to find out,” which led to an open discussion. Sam addressed his view of forgiveness, “Forgiveness, it’s a big word. It means everything and nothing at the same time.” Several admitted to struggling with the meaning of forgiveness especially as it pertains to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These responses coincided with one of the five challenges to forgiveness that I introduced in the Introduction—forgiveness as a nebulous concept.

To encourage exploration to find meaning to forgiveness, I prodded open discussions prompted by the interview questions. I found that most interviewees held the

view that forgiveness is something that happens *following* a wrong doing, which I believe is certainly the view held by several of the philosophers whose work was presented in Chapter II (Arendt, 1958; Griswold, 2007; Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Sadler, 2009) and others. In contrast, there were other concepts of forgiveness that included similar and conflicting elements that affected one's view of the world especially as it pertained to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An example of this contrast is in the statement by Yitzhak, "[there is] too much emphasis on forgiveness; can carry on without forgiveness" while Sa'ed expressed forgiveness as, "Forgiveness is the driving force, it is the fundamental element to be able to move in that [reconciliation] direction."

Although I found several themes through these interviews, many of the responses to questions intersected various themes, which may appear to be redundant, yet I felt they were important to include. Also, I will point out that not every interviewee responded to each question asked. For some, responses were based on issues that were related to the question topic rather than addressing direct answers to the specific question.

I will now present the findings yielded from the interviews by correlating the themes found through participants' responses that provide greater detail and descriptions of forgiveness and how it relates to each one's engagement with the conflict.

### **Forgiveness as a Humanistic Behavior**

The term most frequently mentioned when discussing forgiveness was humanism, or the need to see others as human beings as having common human capacities that must be acknowledged. Most expressed that humanism is what is needed in order for the occupation to end and move towards peaceful and respectful coexistence. All

interviewees expressed sentiment that Israel must recognize the Palestinian people as human beings who share basic human principles with Israelis and this recognition will be the first step to ending the occupation.

Avner, a former Israeli soldier and a member of *Breaking the Silence*, an organization that exposes the realities of Israeli army actions, shared why this organization was formed. He told of how following the Second Intifada [the second Palestinian uprising against Israel, which began in September 2000] Israel imposed curfews, night raids, enforced occupation and other oppressive enforcements of which most Israelis had no awareness. Following the uprising, *Breaking the Silence* was formed and the organization created a photo exhibit of pictures of soldiers that served in Hebron (a Palestinian city in the southern West Bank) that exposed these atrocities. Avner described the impact of the photo exhibit on Israel.

This was the talk of the country for about weeks. Close to 10,000 people, Israelis, mostly Israeli Jews came to see the exhibit, and this was not the first time but definitely a peak in Israelis addressing the price we are paying for this long-lasting occupation. And from that moment to make a long story short, the organization was pretty much formed . . . like the initial idea, to expose the day-to-day reality, the idea was really to continue that project. The heart of *Breaking the Silence's* work is gathering testimonies, so I'm sure you saw this on our website.

Avner was raised in Israeli and both his father and older brother served in the Israeli army. Given his traditional background, I asked him how or when he came to view the realities of the Israeli army practices as being inhumane. He remembered as a fourth or fifth grade student his parents woke him and his brother to tell them of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. (Yitzhak Rabin was the former Israeli Prime Minister



elected in 1974 and forced to resign in 1977, and re-elected in 1992. Rabin was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for his negotiations for withdrawal of occupied territories that would lead to the end of the conflict. He was assassinated in 1995 by an Israeli extremist). Avner told how his parents had “tears in their eyes” as they told of the assassination, however, at school many of his classmates were happy with the news. About this experience, Avner remembers, “And I realized that, wait, I’m not them. I’m different from those kids.” He added, “I realized that I believe in, and I think I realized that I’m a humanist, I realized that I’m a socialist, that I believe in the cohesiveness of society, that I believe in humanity.” He explained how this realization stayed with him through his military career and formed his commitment to social justice.

So, if we’re all equal and human, so how am I treating Palestinians as not equal? How does that make sense? And I think that as I continued with my service and I had more power as a commander, and more experience as a soldier, I realized the arbitrariness of occupation, or the banality of things, and how I actually decided what house we enter, then I decided how long we stay, and I could decide how violent I was, and I realized I don’t like the way I am acting. I don’t like the way people around me are acting.

Avner’s realization of his responsibility in the treatment of the Palestinian people was what led him to join *Breaking the Silence* as a way to “deal with this abnormal reality” and commit to exposing the inhumane acts that were taking place. I wanted to know if Avner thought that forgiveness played a role in his realization of the Israeli army’s treatment in which he was a part. He first asked me what I meant by forgiveness and he seemed to struggle to find a definition, and finally stated, “I don’t know. I feel that I’m mostly angry. I don’t think that I’m in a place of forgiveness yet. I feel that most of

my work is calling for political change.” Forgiveness was not connecting to humanism for Avner as he saw forgiveness as something that happens following the occupation. There seemed to be a realization of humanity and its place in the conflict, however, the concept of forgiveness did not seem to relate. Justifying not forgiving at this time he stated, “I don’t want a Palestinian to forgive me for barging into his house, for the practice of straw widow.” (Taking over a Palestinian home is called straw widow, and is an ongoing practice of the Israeli army).

I don’t want that because there’s another guy exactly like me, could be my cousin or my brother, when they’re, in both cases, are pretty reasonable, that are also doing the same thing. So, he’ll forgive me now, but in the same night my younger brother will go in and enter his house. So, I’m wondering what place is there for forgiveness inside a political struggle?

As he thought more about forgiveness he described his relationship with Palestinian friends and that possibly forgiveness has played a role in these relationships.

We’ve talked about a variety of things and the fact that I was guarding their village or preventing them from leaving their homes. So I don’t think we ever contextualized it in forgiveness, but I think that there was sort of an understanding that, on an individual level, we are sort of engaging and accepting this idea of . . . yeah, maybe forgiveness, but I think that there’s a difference between the individual and the collective.

It seemed that here he was viewing forgiveness as needed for healing especially between people who cared about each other’s feelings and well-being, a behavior that on an individual basis was possible, however, not on a collective basis such as Israel’s treatment of Palestine.

Similarly, Rami, also an Israeli, shared his transformation from what he had been living and believing as an Israeli. He spoke of this transformation as an enlightenment that was precipitated by an act of violence.

And I was living a relatively, a very good life. My wife, my family, everything seems relatively okay. In a way you could say we put ourselves into a bubble. And this bubble was blown up to millions of pieces on the 4th of September 1997, and this was the beginning of a journey towards redefining myself as a Jew, as an Israeli, as a person. And mostly a journey towards the other side of the conflict which was hidden from me for so many years.

The tragedy that Rami spoke of was the killing of his 14-year-old daughter by a Palestinian suicide bomber. Rami spoke passionately about how this day in September of 1997 changed his life and his understanding of the conflict. He stated, “The conflict is between those people who want peace and are willing to pay the price of peace, and all the rest.” The loss of his daughter led Rami to the Bereaved Parent’s Circle/Family Forum, an organization of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost loved ones in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are working for peace. It was through this organization that he met his friend Bassam, a Palestinian man whose 10-year-old daughter was killed by an Israeli sniper, where the two men formed a trusted relationship that they refer to the other as “brother.” Bassam asked Rami to accompany him to Germany, which was a difficult journey for Rami as he is the son of Holocaust survivors. He spoke of his conception of Germany as a “cursed language, cursed culture, cursed people.” Whether this journey was suggested as a way for Rami to heal from his loss is not clear, however, it was a “journey of transformation” for Rami. He explains, “I was in a jail of prejudice, ignorance, and lack of understanding because I still feel strongly about the Holocaust.”

[It was] something revolutionary, it changed my mind, it changed my . . . When Bassam is talking about taking out of the jail of inhumanity, this was exactly what happened to me. I believe in people. I believe in humanity. I believe that people can change. And I believe in not hating forever.

Rami shared that the transformation came about as he witnessed the German government and people taking responsibility for the atrocities committed by the German people through ensuring that all young people living in Germany know their country's history. I wondered if taking responsibility for a wrongdoing or crime was the same as or related to forgiveness. I asked Rami about his understanding of forgiveness and similarly to Avner, the concept did not come easily to him.

Frankly, I don't understand this concept of forgiveness. I cannot understand how can you forgive the killing of innocent people. How can you forgive the killing of little children? It doesn't really matter if they are Jews or Arabs, or Red ones or Blue ones, or whatever. And what I'm doing is not forgiveness; it's not about forgiveness. It's about a way to go on living. I believe that in this spectrum of forgiveness on one hand, and hatred, on the other hand, there is something in the middle, which is called reconciliation. Reconciliation is something that needs understanding and respect to the other guy.

From his statement that what he is doing (his work with the Parents' Circle) is not forgiveness, I was left with the impression that for Rami forgiveness was the opposite of hatred or anger and possibly he held these emotions even though his work is about healing. When asked if anyone had asked him for forgiveness for a wrongdoing, he replied that he could not think of anything specifically, except that he is “. . . ashamed of the behavior of my own people, especially towards Palestinians.” He is quick to add that he did not ask for forgiveness for his participation in three wars where “I have blood on my hands. It's not about forgiveness. Forgiving is just a word.”

Followed closely from Rami's journey with his culturally-embedded understanding of living within the conflict to a humanistic view of the other is a similar journey by Bassam, a Palestinian, and close friend of Rami's. It was the murder of each one's daughter caused by the conflict that brought these two men, from each of the countries, to a common cause—ending the conflict.

Bassam tells of his growing up in Palestine as not understanding why Israeli soldiers came to his village or why they would treat his people brutally when they would protest for their "right to autonomy," not knowing the meaning of autonomy. He stated that growing up he did not know what Jewish meant or did not speak Hebrew. As a young boy Bassam would join his friends in protesting by raising the Palestinian flag, "which made the Israeli soldiers crazy." He talked of being on the fringe of the protesting because he has a limp caused by polio and his friends would protect him as he could not run when the boys were chased by the Israeli soldiers. About the Israeli soldiers he describes, "They teach us how to hate them, how to fight them because of their behavior." At age 17 Bassam was arrested and put in jail for seven years as a result of protesting and only knew to hate his enemy, the Israeli jailers, and, as a result was severely beaten and tortured. Bassam decided that in order to kill his enemy he needed to know as much as he could about Israelis and began studying Hebrew. He had heard the term Holocaust, but did not know what it meant nor did he know about Hitler and the Jews, but wanted to learn for reasons other than an empathetic understanding. While in prison Bassam watched *Schindler's List*, a movie based on the true story of Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi party who recruited Jews to work in his factory in order to save them from

Nazi atrocities. He spoke about wanting to see this movie, see the Jews tortured as they were torturing him and his friends. Bassam's voice became soft as he shared, "And after a few minutes, I found myself crying. I just cry for the women, for the kids, for the innocent people, naked, waiting for the police with unbelievable silence." He shared how desperately he wanted to talk to his jailers about what he saw and ask questions, but Palestinian prisoners are not allowed to talk to the jailers, so he began asking questions of fellow prisoners. In Bassam's quest to find answers about why people treat others as he experienced, he began to talk with a jailer about these issues and they became friends. Bassam explains the reason for this relationship by sharing, "Because he understood my quality and he understood that I am not a killer; I'm not a terrorist. I'm just like you." He shared that his jailer told him, "I'm ready to live in peace with you." This was Bassam's transformation, his coming to understand the human qualities of all people, and as he put it, "... the humanity of the enemy." He stated further, "If you want to change others, you need to change your way. And this is in the very personal level, even to neighbors, with your husband, your wife, your kids." About his time in jail he saw it as spending seven years for his family and their freedom and lives his life with a commitment to humanity and ending of the conflict.

On January 16, 2007, Bassam's 10-year-old daughter, Abir, was shot by an Israeli sniper and died two days later. She was outside of her school at 9:30 a.m. that morning with her sisters and friends following a math class. Through Bassam's grief he states he does not want revenge, but does want justice and worked to bring the killer to justice

through the court system. Unlike Avner and Rami, Bassam has a clear understanding of forgiveness and what it means in his life. He was strong in his discussion of forgiveness.

I understand what's the meaning of forgiveness. It's a deep sea; it has a deep value in my religion and in my culture as an Arab and as a Muslim, mainly. And always I said that forgiveness is a religious concept. It is also a human concept because I believe as religious man that religion goes with the nature of the human beings. It is not against them.

He spoke further about forgiveness as a position of strength, a way of life, a kind of revenge. I asked him to say more about forgiveness as a kind of revenge and he explained,

If the killer of my daughter came to me one day and asked me to forgive him and he came down on his knees, ask for my mercy, I will take my revenge by forgiving him without any mercy. He will expect me to fight him, because he sees me as a savage, as a killer, but instead I will forgive him. Forgiveness is a responsibility, a kind of revenge.

Bassam's understanding of humanism that he discovered while in prison stays with him and he is able to see the humanity in all people. "It starts inside of yourself that you are human beings, when you start to discover we are all human and to understand that we belong to mankind."

These experiences as conveyed by Avner, Rami, and Bassam in the face of personal and communal violence deeply impacted me and led me to explore all aspects of my worldview, both locally and globally. If this commitment to human qualities in all people regardless of their behaviors against one another, the power to transform offers great possibilities in achieving social justice consciousness. What I found important in these findings was that all three shared an awareness of the humanness of the other,

which resulted in profound insight into their own behavior towards those who were previously seen as enemies. This insight allowed them to come together for a common cause.

My interview with Sa'ed also supported these findings. Sa'ed, is a visiting assistant professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Swathmore College in Pennsylvania. He describes himself as gay and a Muslim who grew up in the Palestinian occupied territories. Sa'ed was in high school during the second Palestinian uprising, “. . . witnessing the profound injustice and massive scale of violence, which has forever been with me.” He understood the importance of social justice early in his life as he attended a Quaker school established in the 1800's. As a Muslim growing up in Palestine, he talked about seeing the human capacity for so much evil in the world as well as the human capacity of good. Sa'ed also talked about the importance of recognizing the humanity in everyone. He shared, “I think that is the fundamental humanity of everyone. The fundamental dignity of everyone. The fundamental equality and access to rights that should be available to everyone.”

Sa'ed spoke of the “fundamental goodness” that supports the concept that people can change. “None of us are static and I have seen so many people transformed. I see many people who are Zionist who become anti-Zionist and so many people who are homophobic who become committed to LGB rights.” As a professor, Sa'ed impresses upon his students the importance of social justice and activism.

The importance of humanity especially in seeing people on both sides of the issue as victims that Avner, Rami, and Bassam, shared, Sa'ed, also considers his oppressors as



victims. He answered the question about how he views those responsible for the violence and destruction in his country, “Even in the face of my oppressor, I believe in humanity as I understand that they, too, are victims of this reality.” When asked what human qualities he draws on to forgive, he answered, “My ability to see Jewish humanitarianism and Jewish ethics and values in spite of the political climate. These are the qualities of forgiveness: recognizing the humanity in everyone.”

It is here that I refer to the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas that was introduced in Chapter II and, specifically, his writings on responsibility for the Other as a given in human relationships. Through the voices of interviewees, highlighted is an understanding of a common humanity that requires a lived responsibility for the well-being of each other. This theme that is related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be emphasized throughout the conversations.

To continue with this theme, I introduce Maha who lives in the Gaza Strip (a small strip of land located along the Mediterranean coast, bordering on Israel and Egypt) under daily oppressive practices by Israel that imposes sanctions (water, fuel, food, etc.) against this Palestinian territory. Setting up the interview was difficult as Maha explained that without warning, electricity will be shut off for up to 18–0 hours a day, leaving homes with no ability to communicate or carry out necessary daily activities that require electricity. We had to set up several different times as once a time/date was established, she would lose her ability to communicate through Skype. This interview began not knowing how long we would have before electrical power was shut off on her, which

added an urgency to our conversation. However, we were able to complete the interview and have since communicated through email and Google.

She lives with her parents and takes care of her mother who is ill. She also accompanies her nephew to a hospital in Israel every two to three months for medical treatment. They need to get permits to travel outside of the Gaza Strip for the medical treatments, and many times they are regularly stopped at the border just long enough so their appointment with the doctor has been missed. What most impressed me about Maha's interview was her unyielding commitment to humanity given the daily conditions that she and her family endures. When I asked her about how she is able to engage in work for peace under these conditions, she replied, "Human understandings should be put above politics and religion." She is able to separate the oppression by the army and government from deep-rooted beliefs in humanity. She stated, "You can be against the army without being against human beings." She sees humans as being born with "good souls" and believes that people need to connect with each other, to listen to each other, "even through pain and despair." This statement reminded me of Bassam's account of being in jail, thinking he should hate his jailers, yet wanting to understand them and know them.

Maha's outlook on humanism mirrored that of Avner, Rami, Bassam, and Sa'ed, especially in her belief that all people have both good and bad in them and are capable of choosing how they will live.

You know like I don't blame, of course I am against the government and the army, but I am not against the human beings. I believe that we all are human beings and we are capable of forgiving and we are capable of living in peace. Of course we

all have good sides and bad sides but we need the good sides to emerge. We need to focus on the positive things. We need to have hope.

Maha focuses her work on bringing awareness that it is the governments that are keeping the conflict strong. She wanted me to know that the majority of people in both countries are peaceful. She added, “We are human beings. Just forget about religion and about politics and about nationalities, just connect on the human level. We believe in punishment before we believe in humanism and it saddens me.” She added, “We all have good sides and bad sides, but we need the good sides to emerge. We need to have hope, but suffering takes away hope.”

I am reminded of the comment made by Griswold (2007) presented in Chapter II as he addresses the challenge of practicing forgiveness when evil has been done yet there is a need to work towards reconciliation. I wanted to know Maha’s concept of forgiveness and its challenges while living under such oppressive conditions. She shared the following with me on how she is able to understand the power of forgiveness as she faces oppression on a daily basis.

Well, you know that I am a human being after all and I sometimes have moments of despair. I feel angry, I feel upset, you know I feel that the unjust like this is the people but when I think and I think you know killing each other will lead us nowhere. Hurting each other will lead us nowhere. We need to stop and think. We need to connect on the human level. We need to think and understand each other. Maybe the other side need to have a bad experience, but only talking to each other can make a difference.

Maha followed this thought by telling me a story about a taxi driver who Maha describes as scared as he first began talking with her. After their conversation, the driver said to her, “I had this idea that Palestinian’s are terrorists and they want to kill Israeli’s and after

talking to you, you changed my entire perspective.” Maha followed this story with her belief about engaging in peaceful efforts, “Talking with your enemies and not your friends.”

Continuing to address forgiveness, she explained that there is little conversation about forgiveness in her community as the conversation topics are about peace. “But,” she explained, “forgiveness is part of peace.” She continued on this thought.

If you want to have forgiveness you want to have peace. You have to reconcile with the past and then move on, just think of the future, think of the present day and the future. Think of your children—the future of your children. We need a lot of life for our children; we need a safe environment for our children. We need our youth to be educated.

Maha asked me to think about the possibilities of being able to educate Palestinian youth so they make a positive impact on their community and the world. “If they had this experience they would not be extremists or radical. They would make a positive impact.” She told me how young people in Gaza Strip have no jobs, cannot afford to marry, and are denied basic opportunities, and consequently they lose hope. About forgiveness, Maha added, “Think of who committed the Holocaust against the Jewish people. Muslims? No, it was Christians, yet they [Israel] were able to forgive all of Europe.” I, too, am left wondering why, if Germany can be forgiven for the Holocaust, why can’t forgiveness be practiced between Israel and Palestine.

Gideon, columnist for *Haaretz*, Israel’s oldest newspaper, and activist for the end of the occupation, recently was awarded the Olof Palme Prize for his courageous fight against the occupation and violence. I was able to interview Gideon following his trip to

Sweden where he accepted the award. When I asked him to tell me about his life and work, he referred me to YouTube videos and interviews for information. However, he readily shared with me his work to end the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel. Gideon talked passionately about the dehumanization of Palestinians in the eyes of Israeli's. He shared his foundational belief about the conflict and the occupation.

Israelis never perceive the Palestinians as equal human beings or even maybe human beings like them. As long as this is the case, no solution can be found. If they don't see the other as being equal to you, there can't be justice around.

Gideon was adamant that there cannot be any forgiveness as long as the occupation continues and stated, "You can't forgive someone that you are dehumanizing." He added, "In my field, in this part of the world, forgiveness right now is an irrelevant term because the time has not come either for Israelis to forgive the Palestinians nor will Palestinians forgive Israel."

I want to point out here a finding through these interviews that exemplifies the writings of Eisikovitz (2004) that was introduced in Chapter II, specifically in his example of the constructed wall and other physical barriers that block exposure of Israelis and Palestinians from each other. His point is that notions about each other are developed through limited circumstances and knowledge. This point is demonstrated in statements made by Bassam a Palestinian and Yitzhak an Israeli, both having lost children in the conflict.

Bassam had worked tirelessly to bring the Israeli sniper who killed his daughter to justice through the court system, which had never before been done in this conflict. He

considered the Israeli sniper to be a victim, “Because to kill ten years innocent girl without regret, absolutely is a victim.” He met the perpetrator in the Israeli court and was able to confront him.

I will forgive you not because of yourself at all. It’s because of myself, because I want to clean my heart from this anger because I am a human being, not animal. And, because in spite I am an Arab man and I am a Muslim, but I love my daughter very much. I don’t know why.

I asked Bassam why it was important to him to convey this to his daughter’s killer. He replied, “Because they claim that we don’t love our kids. We teach them to throw stones for the camera and the media. It is unbelievable.”

With similar sentiment, Yitzhak tells of bringing a group of Israeli bereaved parents to Gaza 20 years ago when he was forming the Parent’s Circle to meet Palestinian bereaved parents. During this meeting he saw a Palestinian bereaved mother saying to her friends, “Look, look, the Israeli mother, she is crying. We thought always that the Israelis do not care if they are losing their kids.”

Both sides held assumptions about the other that each lacked a basic human capacity to love his or her children and each considered children as pawns used to fight the other. It was through face-to-face contact and witnessing the pronouncement of love for a daughter and a mother crying for her child that these assumptions were challenged.

Yitzhak explained the held notions as a lack of understanding that we are all human beings. He spoke of the conflict as, “It’s the reality of humanity versus the political machine.” Supporting the power of the political machine and its restrictions on human engagement, Sam shared that it is illegal for Israelis to be in the Palestinian areas,

so there is no real ability for people to interact. He stated, “Even at the very basic level, the environment doesn’t work when you put a wall up between two sides haphazardly, one side or both sides get floods because the water can’t move anymore.”

Similarly, Max also talked of the importance of meeting people and being able to dialogue with each other. He stated, “So intellectually, even more so personally, once you meet people, you have a different perspective.” He also added that following this experience, when one goes back to share this changing experience, others don’t want to hear about it. On a personal level, Max spoke of his own experiences with engaging with others.

I meet Jews for the first time; I meet Muslims for the first time, meet different kinds of Christians, and different kinds of Quakers, and it just opened my whole world in such a way that shook it to its very foundations.

He added, “Experience crumbles the faith world; makes one look at and consider things differently.”

Daniel, sociologist professor at a local university talks about trying to instill in his students the will to challenge common beliefs about people and cultures. He finds it difficult to get students to organize around issues that are blatantly oppressive to certain populations. He expressed how they want to be told what to do and how to express themselves. Daniel shares his experiences of working with oppressed populations around the world, but understands the importance of first-hand experiences.

You just really don’t grasp what it means to be in an occupied area until you go there and you just see the difference between Israel and just you know just driving down the street I Israel as opposed to being in Ramallah (in Palestine), which is

surrounded by this huge fence. It turns like apartheid where a narrative is being put out that is accepted as truth.

Daniel believes that these experiences do challenge common beliefs about people and cultures. He tells about a professor who was part of the trip to Ramallah and after seeing parts of the country, shared with the group about the occupation of Palestine by Israel, “I just can’t believe this. I can’t believe this was happening.”

When people cannot see the other and how he lives, notions are formed through venues such as the media. The impact of imposed separation that witnessed destruction and violence overtakes the ability to tap into the human qualities and values that we all possess. Rabbi Michael addressed this sentiment by stressing the importance of our understanding of the human qualities of ourselves and others. He shared an essential understanding, “Bringing to consciousness the goodness that we all can be. Recognizing equal fallibility with ourselves, and the need to recognize the conditions that have led people to live in contradiction with their own values.” Whether or not the conditions of this conflict had been recognized as causing non-human notions of each other is unclear, however, the recognition of the other having human qualities provides possibilities and hope for reconciliation. He stated, “The lack of forgiveness ends up producing in yourself the very behaviors that you thought were unforgiveable in others.”

To further their thoughts on forgiveness, I will now move to reporting findings on forgiveness as an ethical behavior and its relationship to humanism. I had defined ethics of forgiveness as outlined in this study, to include empathy, sympathy, compassion, love,



and benevolence, and hope as human qualities and practices that are essential in developing moral relationships with each other.

Several interviewees talked about empathy and its meaning with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when asked about the qualities that are drawn upon in order to forgive. Avner talked about the importance of empathy as a human feeling, but thought that a condition of feeling empathy is feeling secure. Avner spoke of empathy possibly from the perspective of a Palestinian. “You have to feel secure to be empathetic, I think. I think at the moment that paradigm changes [Israeli control of Palestinians], which we’re far from it . . . it will be the time to talk about empathy and forgiveness.” However, he also talked about his own feelings of empathy as he spoke of coming to the realization of what his actions as an Israeli soldier was causing for those whose homes he occupied.

My way to deal with this, to reconcile with this, was to speak with the Palestinian families. I think it was a mixture of guilt that I felt. I think it was a mixture of responsibility and empathy, sort of understanding that these people are not to blame and that, how would I feel in their boots. This was not my first reaction. I think it took me a while to sort of feel comfortable in the situation.

Avner spoke of empathy almost in terms of a feeling of privilege, in that one has to feel secure and comfortable in order to feel empathy. On this point, Bassam also spoke of conditions for feeling empathy. He stated, “It is difficult for Palestinians to feel empathy because of their treatment by Israel.” I asked Bassam about his concept of empathy and if or when he feels empathy.

It’s very simple for me. If you have no empathy you are not human being. So I learned if you want to know how good or bad are you, you need to put yourself in the others’ shoes to know if someone did the same to you if you are good or bad.

Bassam further explained that the human qualities towards forgiveness include patience, empathy, and humility, without expectation of reciprocity. He added, “Forgiveness is a way to live.” He also talked about hope, dismissing it as not relevant to the conflict. He further addressed belief as important instead of hope when referencing the conflict.

Yitzhak makes a distinction between forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness as he responded on this topic, “I have empathy. I have sympathy to them, no problem, but not forgiveness.” I asked him to speak more about the distinction and he explained his view.

You see, we say it in Judaism that there are some things that if you destroyed you cannot rebuild it. If you killed somebody, you cannot bring it back. So, there is no forgiveness for killing. If I will take from you now, if I will come to your home and I will take from you \$100, it’s as if I can give you back \$100. I can give you back \$120, \$150 and you will be ready to forgive me, okay?

In this statement, the practice of forgiveness is very clear for Yitzhak. If something taken can be replaced, forgiveness is appropriate. If it cannot be replaced, there is no room for forgiveness.

Throughout my study I have addressed ethics of behavior of which empathy is included as a basis for forgiveness. However, from Yitzhak’s comments, there is a separation between human capacities or ethics of forgiveness and forgiveness itself. In other words, Yitzhak feels empathy and sympathy for others, but does not need to forgive others for some acts of wrongdoing. This perspective may offer another definition of forgiveness that may not be necessary in order to engage in moral relations with others. If empathy, sympathy and other such human capacities are practiced, forgiveness may not be essential for moral repair.

Max told of an experience in learning about Palestinian children showing empathy and sympathy. He shared that as a teacher in Ramallah in 1970, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) hijacked three planes into Jordan and the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) hijacked a plane into Egypt as a protest to release imprisoned Palestinians in European countries. The Palestinian children that he was teaching had heard about the hijacking. “Mr. Carter, have you heard? The PLO have hijacked three planes into Jordan, and the PFLP has hijacked one into Egypt. We don’t want anyone to get hurt.” As Bassam expressed, these human qualities of empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and love, at the basis of concern these children had for the passengers who were on the hijacked planes, are what connects us all. Max expressed how the world does not listen to the empathy of the Palestinian people and asked, “How do we get the world’s attention?” When asked the question about how the conflict has changed his worldview, Max shared, “I get a sense of how conflict and violence totally disrupts the lives of kids.”

Rabbi Michael addressed the human quality of compassion and connecting it to forgiveness as he explains, “Forgiveness also means, I believe in most cases, involves developing somewhat compassion for the other person as a flawed being who came into the world without those flaws . . .” He further explains, “Our narcissistic world we see the world from one’s own perspective. Forgiveness stops here and does not extend to others.” He adds that we must see others as having gone through similar experiences that we have gone through. Returning to the subject of compassion, he adds, “Compassion leads to

changing behavior of self or others from destructive to like G-d. The ultimate goal is not forgiveness but having people experience compassion and generosity for each other.”

Rabbi Michael also addressed the human capacity to love that is embedded in our humanness and cannot be completely destroyed by acts of violence.

We have a central capacity and resource to draw upon. Destruction is never strong enough to totally wipe out this initial legacy of love and care that everybody has experienced. So the love and the transformation of the world is greatly aided by that first step of compassion, of seeing other people in their complicity. Forgiveness is an orientation towards the world and others.

I want to move from a more personal concept of forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness to a political view.

### **Power, Politics, and Responsibility**

All interviewees agreed that the occupation of Palestine by Israel is an impediment to ending the conflict and that until the occupation ceased, there would be no movement towards reconciliation, forgiveness, or peaceful resolution. Many also considered the occupation to be an assault on practices of social justice and equality for the Palestinian people. Although the occupation is the result of political policies, much of the resistance and change efforts are based on arguing for basic humanitarian rights and privileges. The conflict, then, may be seen as political interests vs. quality of life based on social justice principles. Avner addresses this issue with regard to his work with *Breaking the Silence*.

Social justice does not happen. I think if there's something we learn from humanity is that it's like a dog-eat-dog world, the stronger will prevail and there has to be structures in place to allow for equality. So it's distribution of wealth;

it's social mobility. It's, I think, acknowledging communities and responsibility of the majority to protect the minorities.

To further address power and equality, Avner quoted Rav Abraham Heschel, Rabbi and Jewish theologian, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible" conveying that everyone needs to take responsibility for the conflict and its end. Avner adds, "What sometimes happens though, is that we have only black groups that no whites can come in, or only Hispanic groups that no whites can come in, and I look at that and think, "Is that what we really call equality as just building these tiny empires?" About forgiveness, he asks, "What place is forgiveness within a political struggle?"

Another condition most often raised was that the wrongdoer needed to take responsibility for the act before forgiveness could be granted. Yitzhak stated, "Peace requires that we understand we have made mistakes; both sides need to compromise their dreams. This will bring peace." Sam also talked about taking responsibility as "Having to correct what you're currently doing." He explained that forgiveness does not remove accountability, but it doesn't have to be violent. "I think justice is at a societal level. Whereas maybe forgiveness is at a personal level."

As Rami stated earlier, on his trip to Germany and witnessing the country's accountability for its past crimes, his belief that people can change was restored. He described accountability as "making sense out of senselessness" as a responsibility of members of society. He talked about how the political posture of Israel is embedded in Israelis at a very early age.

The conflict is part of our lives. You are born into the conflict. You are being brainwashed to the conflict. You are being prepared by your society to be able to sacrifice yourself when the time comes by going to the Army. You go to the army, you participate in wars, accidents, events, and you lose many good friends. And the conflict is part of your everyday behavior, everyday experience. And yet you manage to live by putting yourself in a bubble. And this is what I was doing after the October '73 war [Yom Kippur war], and I became a kind of an anarchist. I mean, not involved working for the right-wing, working for the left-wing. I am a graphic designer and I did my best to take money from each and every one of them.

From Rami's account I was left with asking how anyone living in these conditions can conceive of humanity as anything different than what is being lived. Rami is critical of those Israelis who "look the other way and ignore the situation" that Israel is dominating other people and not taking responsibility for their actions. He points out incidents such as when there is a stabbing, people wake up and say, "Oh G-d, we are under attack," otherwise they do not react to the ongoing oppression. He indicates that the Israel media is happy with the way things are. About his country, Israel, he stated, "We are very much like people who are trying to draw water from the ocean with a little spoon" and added that before forgiveness procedures begin, the violence must stop. I asked Rami why he thinks Israelis cannot see Palestinians as human beings with feelings.

Because they are afraid. Because we carry on our backs 3000 years of victimhood. And because our leaders, especially Netanyahu, use this fear as a tool. And people are frightened. Every second guy in Israel walks with a gun; they shoot people if they have to. If they don't have to they shoot even their own people. It's completely crazy. It's difficult to give up your right for the ultimate victimhood.

Rami saw the resistance to changing the current power structure as a lack of leadership that could provide a vision of peace. He describes two societies fighting for their lives, however, both are blind to self-respect. He told of the 1995 assassination of

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin who was leading the Israel-Palestinian peace process.

Rabin was killed by an Israeli religious extremist who was opposed to the Oslo Accords, part of the peace process. Rami comments, “The price of peace needs to outweigh the price of not having peace.” He adds that the United States providing unconditional support to Israel contributes to the problem.

To add to the discussion of power, Bassam questioned the role of power suggesting that having power does not equate with being safe. He made his point, “More than 100 years we are trying to defeat each other, to kill each other. We did everything possible as Palestinians. Hence, by the huge power of the Israelis, and until now Israel is not safe.” He went on to say that the blood continues to be shed, pain increases, and the population of victims grows. Bassam uses the example of his time spent in an Israeli prison. He tells of 12-year-olds who have been arrested and kept in prison for years. He experienced guards coming into his section that included these young boys and had them strip naked and ordered to walk to the outside through the corridor where lines of Israeli soldiers would beat each one as they walked through. Bassam told how these incidents were called “prisoners’ massacre.” This is the power that Israel uses over Palestinians. He also talks of the terrorist attacks made by Hamas (governing authority of the Gaza Strip) that could become “ambassadors of peace” if Israel decides to speak to them. He adds, “So, everything is politics.” Bassam makes an interesting observation about the conflict.

All my life, I hear that this conflict cannot be solved in military solutions. More than 100 years we are trying to defeat each other, to kill each other. We did everything possible as Palestinians. Hence, by the huge power of the Israelis, and until now Israel is not safe. Palestine is not free. More blood. More pain. More victims. Why it doesn’t work?

Bassam believes that there needs to be changes in people and not just governments. He stated, “We must change self in order to change others.”

Maha spoke of power as taking over humanity. She added, “When power overcomes people, caring for people stops.” She made it clear that it is both sides, Israel and Palestine, who are putting power before people. About this issue she commented, “I am talking about both sides, not just the Israel side. Both sides are interested in keeping power regardless of power it is everywhere in the world.” She sees the issue of power as becoming more difficult to break through as she added, “It is all about the power and little caring about the people and it is getting worse as we get more individualized.”

As an example, Maha told about Hamas and how the group was elected democratically in 2006 leading the Palestinian people to believe that they would be able to protect Palestine. She states, “Hamas is a political Islamic party but it is not, believe me, now we don’t feel any—in Gaza, they are controlling Gaza but they don’t tell anybody in the streets.” Between Hamas and Israel, Maha told that everything is controlled and no one is safe. She adds, “Palestinians are numb now, they have nothing to lose. They have no more. I keep saying the only victim is the loss of hope. And when you lose hope, you know anything can happen.”

Sa’ed spoke of abuse of power in context of sexual assault. He commented, “A rape victim cannot forgive the rapist while being raped” as an analogy about the forgiveness being given while the occupation continues. He also related being able to forgive before the conflict ends as, “pouring salt into an open wound, while crying out, please stop.” However, in speaking about forgiveness and its conditions, he talked about



having a deep belief in forgiveness and its ability to heal. His belief about forgiveness was stated as, “It is incredibly important; important in post-conflict reconciliation and important as the conflict is unfolding. Maintaining a sense of forgiveness while a conflict is taking place and while oppression is happening is tremendously challenging but needed.” Sa’ed continued by addressing the current power structure and its obdurateness. He shared, “We are never going to transcend this impasse unless we are willing to open our hearts coupled with the asymmetries of power.” He indicated that the privileged have a responsibility to speak out against the injustices. He made the comment, “The most powerful military in the Middle East sees itself as fragile, which enables it to act out in horrific ways while still seeing themselves as victims.”

Sa’ed spoke about how political leaders drive the agenda that they set for political purposes. I asked him about how the conflict has affected his worldview.

Well I think I have a very, very nuance view of the world. I think that just because Netanyahu reports to speak on behalf of world jury, does not actually authorize him as world jury. This notion that Jewish people are monolithic and homogenous—one person can speak for all of their populations worldwide is absurd and highly unsystematic and so by the idea that Zionism somehow embodies Judaism and that Jews should be seen as synonymous is ludicrous.

Sa’ed said he struggles with forgiveness and the challenges that it presents especially while the conflict continues. “One of the challenges that we then face is being able to draw the line and being able to say now we can call for forgiveness that the violence ceases.” An additional challenge that Sa’ed expressed is in finding a way to consider forgiveness when hearts are full of a need for vengeance. Sa’ed found that changing one’s worldview is a challenge, but necessary to the end of the conflict. When

talking about the power of current leadership, he explains that we all have views about who people are and their intentions that are reinforced by symbols and perpetuated by negative and hateful commentary. When worldviews are created by these held beliefs instead of by personal engagement, we hold them to be true. Sa'ed stated, "We have this very challenging undertaking to maintain this nuance view of the world while taking on discourse that challenges this view."

The length at which powerful leaders will go to keep their power is addressed by Max who talked about the 2004 documentary, *The Fog of War*, that follows Robert McNamara's authority that escalated the Vietnam War. The former Secretary of Defense under Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson admits to lying in order to keep the war active, yet never apologizes. Max stated, "Leaders, such as this, are blinded by something."

Daniel held the same sentiment as he added, "We can't talk about forgiveness in the midst of the conflict. Reconciliation requires both parties to be involved. Forgiveness does not. I can forgive someone without having to reconcile." He also added that a condition of forgiveness is that the wrongdoer has to conceptualize what was done to the victim. He further expressed, "I've always thought that forgiveness means dissolving the person from responsibility, but I don't think that is what it is at all. I'm perfectly happy having resentment towards others and going on with my life."

As with others, Sam sees Israel wielding power over the people by instilling fear in the Israeli people that Palestinians want to destroy them. He makes a connection between power and forgiveness by commenting, "When you forgive someone you are

actually empowering yourself to be able to accept that person's mistakes because the next time you make a mistake you are going to look to be forgiven." In this statement, power is not used to oppress, but to empower power through forgiveness. This statement confirms the humanness in all people including frailties such as wrongdoing against others of which we are all capable.

Sam's statement about empowerment may also address what I raised as a challenge to forgiveness in Chapter I, that is, forgiveness perceived as a weakness. He addressed this concept of forgiveness as a weakness by stating, "There's a weakness in forgiveness, as seen by some." The Palestinian interviewees commented that the Palestinian people viewed forgiveness as letting down one's guard, which was something they had learned not to do. Forgiveness created a vulnerability to violence and destruction. I return to Rabbi Lerner's (2012) reference of *freier*, meaning to Israelis, someone who is being taken advantage of or easily manipulated. For Israeli's, forgiveness, or empowering Palestine to have control over their land and their lives, may translate into leaving Israel vulnerable to attacks and destruction of the Jewish State. Considering that this view is realistic, the concept of forgiveness, which would include ending the occupation, may be interpreted into an inability to protect themselves.

There may be a rejection of this concept by those who consider the occupation as the sole cause of the conflict without regard to other contributing factors. Gideon is one interviewee who seemed to take this stand. Gideon shared Sam's view that Israel is using power to instill fear. He stated, "Politicians use trauma for their own purposes, for purposes of manipulation." He also accused the United States as being part of the

problem by supplying weapons to Israel. Of all of the interviews, Gideon was one who was most adamant about ending the occupation before any reconciliatory efforts can be made. His work relates directly to stopping the occupation by Israel and sees this as the solution. He further stated, “In my part of the world forgiveness right now is an irrelevant term because the time has not come either for the Israeli’s to forgive the Palestinian’s nor will Palestinian’s forgive Israel.” He added, “So much hatred and violence leaves no room for forgiveness. Forgiveness cannot happen as long as there is evil.” He described his views on forgiveness as they relate to the conflict stating, “I think forgiveness will be an essential state between Israel and Palestine, but it can only come after the solution, not before.” Gideon talked of hope similarly stating that “there is no hope for peace” referring to the continuation of the occupation.

Rabbi Michael spoke of the need for political action that will work to end the occupation. He talks about what is needed to stop the everyday situation in the region.

[It] requires some um some very strong political action to stop that—to stop that behavior and so we need to have support for a political movement in Israel that is unequivocal to ending the occupation and we don’t have that. There is very little right now that is being done in the world community that is being done to force or support the development of such a force in Israel, and we need the United States to play a significant role in letting Israel know that it can’t continue to do what it is doing. I mean there are a variety of steps that have to be taken to let Israel know that the Israeli government has to change its behavior and at the very least choose to ending the occupational or given the Palestinian’s equal rights with the rest of the Israeli population.

This section points out the need to address the political structures that contribute to the conflict and how current policies need to change in order to instill practices of moral repair and social justice. The question that this view raises is whether or not practices of

forgiveness among Israeli and Palestinian people will have the power to change political structures, or if political structures have to change first in order for practices of forgiveness to create social justice consciousness.

### **The Legacy of Historical Trauma**

The term historical trauma was introduced in Chapter I as a challenge to forgiveness, and addressed by McKnight (2004) in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To briefly recap McKnight's writing on historical impact, he stresses that the effects of past trauma overshadows the recognition of human rights that may inhibit practices of trust among each other. As stories of trauma, in this case the Holocaust, are passed down from generation to generation, vulnerability to annihilation of a total population becomes one's worldview. Protection then, against destruction is considered to be essential and oppressive practices against others ignored.

Rabbi Michael spoke of the Holocaust and the history of the Christian oppression to Jews and Muslims. His response to the question of whether or not pain and anger from past wrongdoing must dissipate before forgiveness can be granted, he spoke of the need to grieve past assaults: "You can't get very far without helping people to grieve what has happened to them." He spoke of oppression as having a legacy, which keeps the pain and hurt alive, referring to it as a "legacy of oppression." This legacy, he explains, contributes to the stand that many take, "Love Israel and ignore their crimes." He also talked about historical trauma in relationship to forgiveness.

The first thing that we have to do is to be working with people on both sides of the struggle to overcome some of their post-traumatic stress disorder because most of the inability to forgive the other has nothing to do with forgiving the other,

but it is about previous assaults on their humanity that have not been worked through and really understood.

He added that people need to fully acknowledge their outrage and hurt about past wrongdoings and be able to mourn how they were treated.

For Muslims it goes back to the crusades and all of the experience of western forces coming in killing, raping, murdering and destroying their society and when that happens over and over again it happens to the history of the Arab world. You can't get very far without helping people grieve what has happened to them and to really express fully their outrage and anger towards that past. And of course then there is the Holocaust and the history of the Christian oppression to Jews and some Muslims and that has to be fully acknowledged and mourned and it really isn't.

Relating historical trauma to the current situation, Rabbi Michael adds, "The current conflict reinforces that which has not been worked through" and pointing out that what was post-trauma has become current trauma.

To underscore this view, Bassam spoke about oppression and how past experiences feed and justify it. He added, "Now you try enduring this relationship, you start to learn about the other side. You start to discover the humanity." Learning about the other side brings a realization that he shared, "This criminal soldier or officer on the other side who tried to kill you every day is the symbol of their oppression, you discover that is a valued human being." Bassam adds that it is easy to oppress and commit atrocities when "... you see yourself as good and the other as bad." Bassam points out that even after years of violence, Israel is not safe and Palestine is not free. He asks, "What has been learned?"

Sa'ed spoke of the prolonged nature of the occupation, nearing seven years, has become "chronic." He added, "Prolonged situation of dominance makes the need for forgiveness even more urgent. Palestinians the same, but diluting the culture is scary."

Steve agrees that both sides have experienced historical trauma adding, "So one doesn't have more than the other." He adds, "It is until you recognize the bigger picture, until you are able to see both boxes. As long as you are stuck in one box, you are going to look at the violence that was done in the other group. You are not going to see the peaceful people in the other group. As soon as you realize that the violence of the other group committed is just as heinous as the violence committed by the other group or maybe even worse, then those historical things lock you in. But once you are able to see the global picture I don't know if that history makes any difference anymore because both sides have that history equality."

Max addresses the memories that Israeli's and Palestinians hold. He stated, "I've never really heard Israeli's and Palestinians talk about forgiveness. It's always about memory." He added, "The great tragedy is that neither side can give up their hope for a better past." His view includes that it will take future generations to finally say, "We need to get past this."

Gideon agreed that historical trauma plays a huge role, but believes, "People can overcome trauma." Gideon shares his view that as long as there is such a hold on historical trauma, forgiveness is not possible. He did not negate the effects of historical trauma; however, he also understands that it can be overcome. He talked about whether or not historical trauma contributes to the conflict.

Absolutely, but let's also say that people overcame traumas very easily. If you eluded to Europe today 70 years after WWII, society is very easy to overcome traumas and at the end of the day traumas are being manipulated by all kind of politicians for all kinds of purposes and I think that a new generation can overcome trauma—it depends on what heritage he gets and what lessons he is getting in the system. So some examples that been made for some years and some other examples that have been made later like in France and Germany or Poland or Germany, no trauma, they are best friends now on a personal basis.

Sam connects forgiveness and historical trauma by stating, “Forgiveness is to be able to reach a point of historical reconciliation. To acknowledge that there has been a wrong, a historic wrong done, but not to repair it by doing more wrongs but rather repairing such as restorative justice.”

According to Rabbi Michael, Gideon, and Steve it is possible to overcome historical trauma, however, as Gideon states, when traumas are used for manipulation purposes, it is more difficult to resolve. Rabbi Michael agreed that historical trauma has now become current trauma due to the conflict. On this same issue, several spoke of historical trauma being used as justification for oppressive practices of Israel against Palestine, which makes the practice of forgiveness that much more difficult.

Rami talked about the difficulty that Israeli's have in “giving up the right of victimhood. He explains that it is due to a fear and adds, “Because we carry on our backs 3000 years of victimhood. Because it's under our skin, this fear of being wiped out.” He explains that giving up victimhood as a “right,” which makes it difficult to see the other side. He stated, “And it's very difficult to give up your right for the ultimate victimhood. Look at the pain of the other side. It's almost impossible. Especially when you are, what seem to you that you are under attack.” He describes this view as “the



essence of the problem.” He used the following analogy, “You are like a guy who’s holding a tiger by its tail, and there are teeth in the other end and you say, ‘You cannot leave the tail because it will kill you.’” He goes on to say that this belief is why “the agreement is left on the table.” He talks about how the leadership of Israel uses this fear as a way to “hold the Israeli people hostage.”

Yitzhak also spoke of instilled fear because of historical trauma. He added, “There are weak leaders on both sides with deep psychological barriers of fear, hatred and despair. Fear is keeping people from voting for leaders who want peace.” In an attempt to show the Israeli people how they are connected to the conflict, Yitzhak was part of an effort that brought together about 100 groups as a study to understand how they were connected to the conflict. He described the purpose, “And we came to the idea to go in a paradoxical way to show to the Israelis how they are attached to the conflict, how the conflict is part of the DNA of the Israeli society, how the conflict united us.” This effort brought awareness to participants in the study of how they are connected, which resulted in many participants becoming engaged in breaking the connection and wishing to compromise on the settlements.

Maha understands oppression as being the root cause of radicalism. She stated, “When people have nothing to lose, they fight.” She also views the inability to reconcile the past as keeping oppression alive which affects all human beings and their relationships.

If you want to have forgiveness you want to have peace. You have to reconcile with the past and then move on, just think of the future, think of the present day

and the future. Think of your children—the future of your children. We need a lot of life for our children, we need a safe environment for our children.

Sam connected oppression and forgiveness by stating, “Palestinians for the most part do not commit violence which is shocking according to their level of oppression. This is forgiving.” On this topic, he added, “Forgiving, not dropping their rights and I think forgiveness should not be confused with dropping your rights. Forgiveness to me is something where you’re not seeking revenge. What we’re seeing in the street today is literally a hand dozen, a dozen or two violent people who lost hope or whatever. As a community, I’m shocked as an American of how little violence comes out of this community, when I now know the level of oppression that’s here, and I’m speaking of someone who’s in Palestine. I can only imagine people who have been living in the refugee camps around two hours from their house for 67 years, not being able to get in. That’s a huge, huge weight on the society’s shoulders and the way they’ve dealt with it is in a forgiving kind of way.”

Specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a legacy from historical trauma has been developed that translates into acts of oppression and inequality. Some view it as intentional manipulation by political leaders, while others see it as something that can be overcome. Either way, participants agree that oppressive practices need to end, people on both sides need to grieve their past, and a new future needs to be built that reflects equality and practices of social justice.

I find it appropriate here to include the religious perspectives that interviewees shared. I find it belongs here under historical trauma because of the rooted history of the

religions that are connected in this study and secondly, because within each of the religions there is a history of trauma and persecution that has formed a legacy reflected in present-day practices. Definitions and concepts of forgiveness have deep and embedded religious roots as addressed in Chapter II. Newman (2013) wrote of forgiveness from the Jewish religion as a moral deed that focuses on the other, suggesting that there needs to be a practice of empathy, sympathy, and other ethics of forgiveness as have been discussed. In the Christian religion, references to forgiveness is many times made through the teachings of Jesus and his utterance when nailed upon the cross asking G-d to forgive those who have persecuted him. In Christianity, Lauritzen (1987) ties the belief of forgiveness to a belief in G-d. Similarly, forgiveness is expressed in the *Qua'ran* giving three different meanings that mirror the meanings of both Judaism and Christianity. The similarities in all three include the ultimate power of G-d to forgive.

Many interviewees conveyed the influence of their perspective religious upbringings and/or beliefs as they spoke of forgiveness and its place in their lives.

Avner spoke of being raised in a practicing Orthodox family with parents who are children of Holocaust survivors. He spoke of questioning society and religious beliefs especially following his tour of duty in the Israeli army. He added, "Both my parents, and definitely my dad, were sort of thinking out-of-the-box," which provided support through the questioning of his beliefs. He explained that he questioned his beliefs and his culture by continually asking questions that pushed him to think about what he was taught related to his current experiences about the world.

I think that like any religion or culture, or belief or set of beliefs, it's easy to take it to different places, it's easy to manipulate it. There were Christians that were fighting to end slavery and abolish it and Christians that were fighting to maintain it. There are Muslims that are fighting to cut people's heads off, and there are Muslims that are fighting for peace and equality. If it's so easy to manipulate, then what truth is there in it? And I think that I am looking for a truth, I am looking for a reason. I think my reason or my truth is sort of a humanistic perspective, putting humans on top and not necessarily a divine being.

Avner explains that he no longer practices his religion as humanism guides his life and worldview.

Rami explained that as a Jew, "It is not a tradition to forgive. We ask for forgiveness from G-d, not people." He explained that conversely the Christian concept of forgiveness is "giving the other cheek, but this is not so in Judaism." When he did speak of Judaism or being a Jew, it was from a cultural perspective rather than a religious perspective. He did not indicate whether or not he currently practices Judaism.

Bassam spoke of forgiveness as taught in the Muslim religion. He talked about forgiveness having deep value in the Muslim religion and Arab culture. He added, "It's a human concept. We are messengers of G-d. When you have such a tragedy and atrocities you can also forgive. You can follow us and you will discover that if you forgive you will live in peace, even in the middle of violence." He spoke of a strong connection between religion and humanism.

Forgiveness has a deep value in my religion and my culture as an Arab and as a Muslim mainly. And always I said that if forgiveness is a religion, religious concept. It is also a human concept because I believe as religious man that religion goes with the nature of the human beings, it's not against them.

Maha spoke similarly of the Muslim religion and Arab cultures, “Our religions are peaceful ones, not terrorist religions.” She pointed out that Muhammad, Abraham, and Jesus all talk about forgiveness. “We are the religion, we have the Christianity and Judaism and Islam are created by one G-d.” Maha also pointed out how the media uses religion to instill fear and hate. In contrast, she stated, “We are human beings. Just forget about religion and about politics and about nationalities, just connect on the human level.”

Sam saw forgiveness as not intricately linked only to a religious understanding. He explained, “There are two parts to religion: the spiritual and the interpretive part. Churches are the interpretive.” For religious purposes, he describes himself as a “secular guy” and does not think that one has to have a religious practice to forgive. He states, “I think that someone can even be an atheist and have a need to forgive.”

Yitzhak had another view of the role that religion plays in forgiveness and specifically, the conflict. He expressed, “Some using religion against peace.” He added about the murder of his son by Hamas stating that he is not angry at G-d for Arik’s death. He added, “I thank G-d for bringing Arik to be buried as many families do not have their lost ones returned.” He explains his philosophy about religion and forgiveness as, “I worship G-d, he doesn’t worship me. That’s my philosophy. I will reconcile, will compromise, will make peace, but not forgive. Only G-d can forgive. I have empathy. I have sympathy to them, no problem; but not forgiveness.”

Max spoke about forgiveness and his religious beliefs as, “When G-d forgives you, G-d wipes the slate clean.” He explains that for Quakers, it’s just not belief but experience. He talked about Christianity and war stating, “I’ve got this; I’ve got this, how

do you bring these two worlds together. As a Quaker, you are raised to believe and then experience confirms that there is G-d in everyone.” Similar to Avner’s questioning, Max added, “As a Quaker, I can’t go just by belief. It must be validated by experience. Going to Shabbat services, reading and hearing about justice and then going outside and experiencing injustice. Where is the disconnect?”

Rabbi Michael explained about forgiveness from Jewish teachings by stating, “We are the embodiment of G-d and if we want G-d to be engaged in and with us then pay attention to G-d’s call for us to be forgiving and generous and loving toward others.” Rabbi Michael talked about Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath begins Friday at sundown through Saturday at sundown) services and acknowledgement of the conflict.

When we teach *Torah* each week and we try to highlight each week what the *Torah* is teaching us and so that doesn’t emerge as a value suddenly as in a relationship with Israel or Palestine, but is prevailed and based on the way that we do our Judaism and how we interpret the *Torah*, and what prayers we say. For example, when we say the prayers for the well-being of others we include specifically the Palestinian people and of course one of the things that I do is to share online with people the various things that are happening in Israeli and Palestine so people get a less distorted view then they get in the media. That has some humanitive impact that people are receiving because the information they get is largely distorted and one sided.

Steve commented on a connection between religion and forgiveness by stating, “We must move past of each side thinking they are on the side of goodness.” He added that we must look at other’s from “G-d’s view” meaning that everyone is the same, we are all human.

For many, religious views could not be separated from views and practices of social justice and equality, however, all saw justice and equality as essential in ending the occupation.

### **Justice, Equality, and Forgiveness**

Avner spoke of the difficulty of forgiveness in the midst of oppression and inequality as something with which he struggles. He again spoke about how he questions the concept of equality when he sees exclusivity in groups even though these groups are formed because of the oppression they experience in the larger society. He earlier referred to this as the “building of tiny empires.” He viewed Israel’s occupation as paying a high price for its oppression against Palestinians.

Sa’ed also responded similarly, “We can’t call for Palestinian rights and self-determination while simultaneously reinforcing anti-Semitism, for example.” He added, “We cannot call for women’s rights while being racist.” He stressed that it is important to understand the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression and how these different forms of oppression are “intricately linked.” He added, “I mean you know I am really haunted by the kinds of things that we saw and the way that it impacted my family, but I am also the social fabric of my community and the broader society and so I, once you experience that you realize that you can’t be silent that you have to actually do something to address the situation.”

Max spoke about how the denial of the occupation by Israel keeps oppression strong. He stated, “Taking in and experiencing oppression changes one’s worldview.” He also views the importance of “letting go” of memories or forgetting wrongdoing in order

to move beyond justification of oppressive practices. He stressed, “We need to address inequities in economics. Denial of experience keeps oppression strong.” He gave the example of Israel denying experiences as exposed through the work of *Breaking the Silence*.

Daniel stated that Palestinians living in occupied territories is similar to apartheid. He also criticized the military support by the United States as encouraging the oppressive practices of Israel. He stated, “The U.S. is supporting the Israeli military by sending weapons without questioning how they are using it to oppress others. Those working for peace by exposing oppressive practices are being called traitors.”

Values such as equality, social justice, and justice were weaved through interview responses to views on forgiveness. Several interviewees addressed differences between forgiveness and an apology and many related forgiveness as a way to live through practices of ethics of forgiveness that have been previously addressed. Rabbi Michael talked about his view of forgiveness as a human behavior.

Forgiveness is a state of being as well as a state of action. It is an orientation towards the world and others and their equal humanity with ours and themselves. It means recognizing their equal fallibility with ourselves and I think it is really to be able to be a forgiveness to accept and confront one’s ongoing imperfections.

Rabbi Michael continued by explaining that as part of a narcissistic society one sees the world solely from one’s perspective and “forgiveness stops right there and does not extend to other people.” A consciousness that includes seeing the other as “someone who has gone through life experiences,” who can be seen as not evil, but as someone who has experienced a tragedy that may explain behaviors of wrongdoing. Having this



consciousness allows feelings of compassion and love towards others towards others. He added, “We have to develop compassion for them and approach them with a compassionate understanding and a sense of forgiveness to the way that they have acted in a destructive or hurtful way.”

Avner also addressed forgiveness as a way to live. “It is not just an apology but a way to live.” When asked to talk about a time when he forgave someone, he talked about forgiving his wife or someone on the street who bumped into him. He separates forgiveness by importance of the wrongdoing.

Yeah, I think life is full of forgiveness. I forgave my wife yesterday after getting angry at her when she didn’t listen to me, or I forgave my friend for misinterpreting what I said. I forgave the guy pushing me down the . . . Knocking me down running down the subway. I think life is full of forgiveness. It’s more of a straightforward like cost benefit. Why should I waste my time and be angry and spend energy on something, which isn’t that important? If something is that important I’ll wait longer before I forgive, or maybe I won’t forgive at all.

Sa’ed also talked about the difference between apology and forgiveness by stating, “Forgiving needs to be a verb, an actual practice.” Sam’s view of the difference was similar as he stated, “Forgiveness is more than an apology. Actions need to happen. Forgiveness is not necessarily a material action, but an acknowledgement within the human mind and spirit.” He further explained, “Accountability, on the other hand, does have a material component as you might go to jail or you may have to create a fund in response to a social justice or restorative justice kind of act.”

Max’s view of forgiveness as a way to live one’s life was expressed as, “You can’t say I forgive and then live your life as if you don’t. It’s about practice harmonizing

with belief.” He shared an incident where he was faced with forgiving someone for a wrongdoing. He talked about being consumed with anger at a betrayal and to find peace for himself, he forgave that person in order to move on. However, he added that he had to also forget as the incident continually arose. Max has been able to repair the relationship and move on. He tells of a second incident that was also viewed as a betrayal of trust. He described both as, “There was real pain and anger, but the biggest piece for me was betrayal. I felt absolutely betrayed by both. And to me that’s the worst possible thing to betray someone’s trust in friendship.” However, he did forgive both people for purposes of his healing. He shared that he draws on submission and humility and “you just let it go. It’s not about you; it’s not about your ego.”

When asked about how forgiveness is connected to social justice, Gideon separated peace from justice by stating, “I don’t work for peace. I work for justice.” Defining justice in terms of the conflict he stated, “There cannot be justice without seeing the other as equal to you.” He sees the occupation as an injustice to the Palestinian people, which drives his work. He explained, “As long as there is no justice, the rest is irrelevant; there must be justice, not specifically social justice, but justice. Those working on peace will not succeed until there is justice. There is no hope for a political solution as things stand now in Israel—the occupation will not stop.”

Yitzhak sees justice as revengeful, as he stated, “The word justice is something against peace.” Asking him to explain, he added, “What is justice for the Israeli’s is injustice to the Palestinians and what is justice to the Palestinians is injustice to the

Israelis.” Justice to Yitzhak and others was viewed as a type of revenge for what was done to the other.

Bassam spoke of justice when sharing about his daughter’s murder. Unlike Yitzhak, he does not see justice similar to revenge. He stated, “In leaving my daughter to die, I said, I don’t want revenge, I want justice. What is the meaning of justice? Justice is to give me back my daughter, that is it.” Bassam talked of his struggle to bring the perpetrator to justice in the Israeli courts, which did happen after three years. Bassam met the Israeli sniper who killed his daughter and said to him, “I will forgive you not because of yourself at all, it’s because of myself, because I want to clean my heart from this anger because I’m a human being, not animal. And because in spite I am an Arab man and I am a Muslim, but I love my daughter very much I don’t know why.” Bassam reiterated what he previously stated that Muslim men are accused of not loving their children and he wanted the Israeli sniper to know of his love for his daughter.

Others spoke of justice and social justice as the same. Steve connected justice to the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Sam spoke of justice as, “Correcting the wrong without causing additional damage. This is how we move forward.” Avner expressed that social justice is “built” as it cannot evolve on its own. He shared, “Structures that don’t allow equality promote violence.” Sa’ed considers forgiveness as being coupled with justice indicating that forgiveness must be a way to promote justice. Rami, too, speaks of equality and justice giving the choice to, “Share the land or share the graveyard.”

I want to close out this section by addressing justice in terms of retribution and/or revenge, which some may consider to be justice. I reference back to Chapter II and the work of Griswold (2007) who addressed revenge and its power and control over one's emotions that drives pain and hurt. The testimonials provided in this study include deaths of sons and daughters at the hands of those who may or may not know why they hate or commit such violence. The result, however, does not depend on any reasoning, but is the cause of pain and suffering for many. The challenge for forgiveness is in acknowledging the moral evil that has occurred and somehow choosing forgiveness in order for personal healing and moral repair to take place. As Griswold (2007) also points out, anger at a wrongdoing is both necessary to forgiveness, but what may also drive retributive acts. Daniel makes this point also as he talks about the importance of anger. He expressed the importance of forgiveness in personal healing, "Forgiveness is a process in our own healing. Forgiveness given too quickly may quell the appropriate anger to propel a movement forward. We push forgiveness too quickly as anger can be a part of healing." Murphy wrote about the excesses of resentment and the resulting justifications, which comes from the root, justice (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). As such, I want to include those participants who spoke of revenge and retaliation.

I begin with Avner's concept of retribution as being opposite of forgiveness. He shared, "There is no need for it if there is an understanding of why one injures another." Avner tells of an incident experienced as a sergeant of a sniper's team. As the team was looking for Palestinians, they were discovered and his friend, fighting beside him was shot. Avner's team began to fire back "without even knowing what we were shooting at."

Following the recovery of his friend, Avner remembered thinking about that incident and coming to the realization that the bullet that hit his friend could have hit him “between the eyes.” He related this incident to feelings of anger and retribution.

I don't feel that I am in need of retribution, because I don't think that they are to blame. I think that they were pawns exactly like I was a pawn. So, I think the idea of retribution or, I don't know, vengeance, is a human feeling, but once you really break it down it is so difficult to talk about who is really responsible. The ethics of war, this is a big question, right? Who is responsible?

Avner separates the individual feelings from the political structure suggesting that the political structure of war and conflict refuses to consider forgiveness or its relation to vengeance.

And I think in political structures one of the things that you manage to do, is that you sort of take away the idea of vengeance and forgiveness and retribution, because it's big. You take it down from the individual base and turn into a collective, and then no one is responsible pretty much, besides states, but states are responsible, or they'll pay some money, they'll have a public forgiveness ceremony. It doesn't really mean anything.

Bassam spoke of justice and revenge above, however further speaks of revenge by telling about his 13-year-old son who wanted revenge after the murder of his sister.

Bassam told him that revenge is not the answer and as he grew to an adult, his son understood. However, Bassam adds, “I have a feeling that I'm going to lose my son every day.”

Bassam does not turn away from revenge all together, but renames how it is practiced. He says that by forgiving, yet not giving mercy to his daughter's killer, “that is my revenge.” He looks at forgiveness as a responsibility, a “kind of revenge because

revenge by savagery will be expected—killing will be expected, but it won't be provided and the murderer must live with that.” About reconciliation he states that there cannot be reconciliation without forgiveness—this is an important connection for him.

Sa'ed also views vengeance as the opposite of forgiveness. He also holds an understanding that the Palestinian people are also victims of the reality of the occupation.

As soon as we are consumed with vengeance then I believe that the Israeli settlement project and occupation has prevailed in colonizing our hearts and our spirits so I have control over my heart. I am not going to allow myself to be consumed with hatred and anger and vengeance even as I am tremendously oppressed.

Sa'ed talked of vengeance as only seeing the personal pain and wounds and not being able to see the situation from the collective point of view, that is one of humanity.

Maha speaks of “Palestinian's willing to forgive and forget and live in peace” even though they have lost so much, including their homes. About vengeance she adds, “An eye for an eye will make the world blind.”

Max spoke of revenge by telling the story that was depicted in a movie based on a real-life incident, *The Stoning in Fulham County*, about a conservative Amish couple and their baby in rural Indiana. They were in their buggy and a group of teenagers in a car came by them and threw a broken tile at the horse to scare it, which seemed to be a common incident to harass the Amish. As a result, the couple's baby is killed by one of the thrown tiles. The Amish refused to press charges even as law enforcement worked for them to do so. Instead of revenge or what the prosecutors termed justice, the family chose forgiveness and refused to press charges. Their reasoning for forgiveness over revenge

was that they did not want to ruin the lives of the boys. Max tells about the movie made based on this incident and how the family's reasoning based on forgiveness was unfortunately not conveyed. Instead of pointing out the humanitarian view of forgiveness, the refusal to prosecute was based solely on religious tenets of the Amish. Possibly conceiving of forgiveness being given over revenge at such an evil violation, could not be believed.

Sam made a distinction between revenge and accountability conveying the understanding that forgiveness is sometimes interpreted as not holding the wrongdoer accountable for his or her actions.

Forgiveness is not seeking revenge. Some view forgiveness as dropping your rights, as forgetting the past with no corrective action. Forgiving, not dropping their rights and I think forgiveness should not be confused with dropping your rights. Forgiveness to me is something where you're not seeking revenge. You're able to turn the page, but that new page still has accountability on it, still has the needs for my rights to be acknowledged and dealt with. And I think that's very important because in our community, when we say forgiveness it doesn't deplete you of your basic rights or your ability to have justice moving forward.

Sam further stated that once the system in place takes responsibility through a process of justice, which may result in the wrongdoer going to jail, it relieves the need for revenge.

He goes on to say that for the Palestinians, this process has not happened.

The international system of governance has failed the Palestinian people So, I don't think asking the Palestinians to start the process by forgiving, knowing that for 46 or 67 years, the system hasn't worked, that's not a starting point. Once the starting point kicks in, I would actually say the starting point right now, at the moment we're in, is recognizing the State of Palestine, at least acknowledging that we have a right to be here and I call the US to do that.

This section has addressed views of interviewees on justice and its ties to equality and forgiveness. Retribution and vengeance were not viewed as means of justice, but practices rooted in justice depend upon practices of forgiveness and equality with recognition of human dignity. When I asked each interviewee about his/her concept of social justice, most conveyed that they saw no difference between social justice, justice and equality. Rami expressed what others similarly answered in their own words.

Marcia: Talk to me about social justice and what that means to you

Rami: Just one word

Marcia: Two words

Rami: My answer is just one word

Marcia: Oh, excuse me. What is that one word?

Rami: The word is respect. If you respect your fellow human being; if you treat him like an equal as you treat yourself.

I will move to findings from my question of whether or not forgiveness can be taught. The reason behind this question was to explore how, in this embedded conflict, forgiveness may play a role in the conflict's resolution.

### **Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

In Chapter I, I provided an overview of my concept of a pedagogy of forgiveness suggesting that forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness can be taught in environments that prioritize human characteristics and ethics of forgiveness. A pedagogy of forgiveness is less about a curriculum and more about creating a community that practices empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, and trust among one another. All of the participants



expressed that education is important in understanding and practicing forgiveness. They considered their current work in resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as educating people on the human, social, and political aspects of the conflict through bringing an awareness of the consequences of the violence and oppression.

Avner's work with *Breaking the Silence* exposes the realities of the occupation through the testimonies of soldiers who have served in the Israeli army.

We collect these testimonies and we try to let people know about them. So in our educational work we take people to the ground areas we served in. They get a chance to hear about our experiences in the places that this actually happened. We meet thousands of people a year. We give lectures; we show movies. Education needs a fundamental structure to promote change.

He talked about his efforts to reach as many people as possible on both sides of the conflict as well as his work in the U.S.

What I'm hoping that I could let people know and what I'm hoping in my educational work and political work, I'm trying to get people angry, and motivated. And I think that forgiveness is sort of the next step, after we end occupation, after we change this current reality, then it will be time to sit down and speak and hug and cry and . . . But as long as we don't have that, then I . . . I don't want a Palestinian to forgive me for barging into his home.

As this report was being written, *Breaking the Silence* was coming under fire by the Israeli government. The government is demanding the names of soldiers who are providing testimonies in an attempt to close down the organizations. Soldiers who are part of the organization are fearful that they will be prosecuted if their names are released.

Similar to Avner's work in exposing the realities of violence, Max shared how his education from witnessing and living amongst war and violence is what put him on his

current trajectory to work for social justice, equality, and peace. He spoke of attending a youth program at a Friends Church that invited speakers who shared personal experiences of violence and destruction. He recalls a woman from Japan relating how, during WWII, her family had endured weeks of allied bombing that was necessary to “end the war.” One day this young girl and her brother go out to play as the planes had not been heard for some time. As they were playing, she tells of remembering a flash of light and watches as her brother, her family and her home are incinerated. She survived as she was behind a cement wall and was protected from the blast. From his direct experiences and these stories, he shared, “What I experienced shook my fundamentalism. I cannot be a fundamentalist. Forgiveness can be taught. It’s like a sport where you practice and practice and it becomes natural.”

Max regularly held educational programs at Friends Center Guilford by bringing in speakers who have been involved in peace efforts around the world. One speaker was Anne Morrison Welsh, the wife of Norman Morrison, the man who set himself on fire on the Pentagon steps to protest the Vietnam War in 1966. Programs such as these bring an awareness of oppressive and destructive practices around the world that governments either have direct responsibility for or support such as the U.S. weapon support for Israeli’s army. Exposing these practices provides opportunities for people to become involved in creating moral relations and social justice consciousness.

Maha believes that “evil is acquired. It is not in our nature.” She shared that as humans we are born with good souls, and we learn to hate. She added that a climate of forgiveness offers a safe environment and we need to provide this for our children for the

future. She added, “An education of forgiveness will keep them from being radicals or extremists.” Maha sees it as important to continue the peace work and educate people in order to give them hope for change.

We need to have hope. We need to stick to the people that really want this. We don’t have to think about those people that are opposing peace. We need to make small groups grow to bigger groups. You know we need to have seminars with other groups and just invite all these groups and then because all these groups can be under the umbrella of one group. One bigger group that has one goal and one objective, and trust me they can make a difference. Because I think that peace is in the hands of the people and not in the hands of the government.

Maha raises the point that evil and hate are taught and that forgiveness and equality can also be taught.

Sam talked about how kids have difficulty with forgiveness. “They think something is wrong with them if they make a mistake,” which makes apology or forgiveness difficult for them. He sees forgiveness as an educational process by sharing, “I think it can be taught because forgiveness is, in my opinion, something which happens between human beings.” Sam’s children attended a Quaker school where human values are lived. He shared, “You do not need to punish in order to instill social values.”

Bassam shared his experience as a young person demonstrating against Israel without knowing why. He again stated, “Israeli’s teach Palestinians how to hate them.” He added that we must teach forgiveness, “but we cannot do it alone.” Several indicated that education also teaches hate and fear. Bassam shared that for the Palestinian people, they only see the Israeli soldiers and Israeli jailers who can be cruel and we think that all Jewish people are like this. He adds, “Even we’re taught when we were kids that those

people came from . . . I don't know, from outside, to kill us and to occupy us, and they will go back to bring their kids and women because we never see women and civilians.”

Similarly, Rami told of the current educational system in both Israel and Palestine.

We have an educational system that is designed to take the children through a social process, socializing process, to prepare them to be able to sacrifice themselves when time comes. The same system is in the Palestinian side. We prepare the young generation to sacrifice themselves when time comes. And we do that by hiding the other side, demonizing the other side, by dehumanizing the other side to the extent that a young soldier can shoot a 10-years old kid like Bassam's daughter in the head. Or a young Palestinian can blow himself up with a 14-year-old little girl. We are not living in societies that yearn for peace.

Rami told me of a school, Hand in Hand, a center for Jewish-Arab education in six locations in Israel. It is a school of Jewish-Arab integrated learning that stresses inclusiveness and equality where Jews and Arabs learn together and live together. Rami's grandchildren attend one of the six schools.

Rabbi Michael talked about the ultimate goal of education not necessarily being forgiveness, but, “Having people experience compassion and generosity for each other.” He spoke of the need for people outside of Israel to understand the realities of the conflict.

You have to change the people's understanding in the United States because right now the vast majority of people think that Israel is right and the Arabs are wrong and the Palestinian's are wrong and that has to change and people need a massive reeducation around what has gone on in Israel and Palestine.

He talked about the strong Israeli lobby that controls what information is being given to people, especially those in the U.S. and that the U.S. has refused to stand up to the lobbying powers. He reinforces the need for “door-to-door activism” and community organizing as a way to reeducate people so they will confront the support of the U.S.

government. Although there are advocacy groups that hope to affect U.S. policies on Israel and Palestine such as J Street (a pro-peace advocacy group in Washington, DC) they do little in terms of community organizing.

As a professor, Sa'ed, gave his view, "People need knowledge and facts. I remind myself of this and it helps me to forgive." He sees education as very important and needs to include ongoing messages, guidance, role models and inspiration. He adds, "Forgiveness is most effective when we have role models who embody forgiveness and who enact forgiveness." He stated that students are under a lot of pressure to accept what corporations have provided to them. Technology for example is prevalent, yet we are trying to teach social responsibility at the same time. He shared the history of Swathmore College in Pennsylvania, founded in 1864 on Quaker principles and now a nonsectarian college. Its foundation was prominent in the abolitionist and women's rights movements. Sa'ed describes the student body as those who are committed to social justice issues.

Students are incredibly socially conscious and globally conscious and have profound morale compasses and are really, really walking consciousness. A lot of the students want to be in a world—in the way that is not to do harm to others.

Steve also agreed that education is important in teaching forgiveness and justice. "Role models are important in practicing both," he stated, and education is the purpose behind his virtual museum, Promised Land Museum, that he founded and directs. Steve also provides lectures and demonstrations on equality to help us understand how we presently view the world and how many times that view is skewed. His work points out how we many times focus on differences instead of acknowledging how we are identical

to each other. He uses the example of how universities see themselves as rivals instead of how they are the same, as these examples resonate with college students. His message is that we are all in our own boxes and do not acknowledge those of the other. The view of the boxes translates into the restrictiveness of how we view the world.

Daniel, a professor of sociology at a local university, has traveled extensively to parts of the world where people are embroiled in conflict within their countries. He shared that these experiences are a way of becoming educated about other parts of the world and the lives of those who are oppressed and those who are oppressing others. He uses his experiences in his teaching to encourage students to explore worldviews outside of their own.

These findings provide emerging themes that education is important to bring an awareness of oppressive and violent practices that are happening in our own communities and those outside. Whether in a traditional classroom setting or through community-led movements, these findings show that education can occur in many different environments.

As a reminder to the reader, I have dedicated an entire chapter, Chapter VI, to a pedagogy of forgiveness, the fifth theme identified in the beginning of this chapter.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with an explanation of my intent to bring together 12 voices from those who are living in Israel, living in Palestine, or living in the United States, all with a dedication to bring an end to a longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine. In this chapter I looked for relationships between theoretical concepts of forgiveness and actual practices or challenges to practices of forgiveness as related to the conflict. I

specifically chose interviewees from inside, which I consider to be living in Israel or Palestine and interviewees from outside either country yet engaged with the resolution of the conflict. I wanted to explore if and how theories of forgiveness have any practical application to the actual living experiences of those who may fit into a theoretical framework of forgiveness (being a victim of a wrongdoing). I also wanted to explore if and how ethics of forgiveness have impact on an emergence of the ability to view others through a humanistic lens, especially those who are viewed as enemies.

I began with providing a brief overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has taken centuries to develop and nurture through political influence, traumatic histories, religious ideology, and perceptions of survival based on destruction of the Other. There are many more factors that are tied to the conflict than I was able to convey, however, my intent was to demonstrate how this conflict has resulted in a deeply embedded hold that has reduced people's perceptions of life through anger, pain, and fear. Although at times it seemed as though forgiveness was a drop of water that could have little impact on an ocean, I wanted to find if a commitment to and belief in humanism is possible for those whose life experiences have been etched in canvasses of violence and mistrust. I also addressed my reasoning for choosing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the focus of my study on forgiveness. As a Jew who does not share a personal history of persecution and threat of destruction and who lives in a country that is not occupied by an oppressor, I wanted to explore whether my perception and practice of forgiveness was based solely on a naïve worldview that considers moral repair as easily attained.

My research questions were restated in an attempt to align the findings from the interviews with what I was actually trying to discover. From the interviews I hoped to discover, (a) the problems and challenges associated with the practice of forgiveness understood as human capacities and chosen behaviors, in the context of interpersonal relations, cultural identities and practices, and broader social conflicts and violence; (b) the role that ethics of forgiveness plays in the repair of wrongdoing that has broken moral relations; (c) the relationship between social justice consciousness and forgiveness; and, (d) can forgiveness be taught and how. My findings resulted in more surprises and emotional impact than I had imagined at the onset of this study, which I will expand upon in Chapter V.

I followed the stated questions with a biographical sketch of each one of the 12 interviewees that provided an understanding of where they lived, their involvement in the conflict, and an understanding of how the conflict has shaped their current way of life. Regardless of where each one resided, each interview had a deep impact on this study and me, which I attempted to convey in the findings.

Emerging themes from the interviews were identified and placed into the following categories: (a) forgiveness as a humanistic behavior; (b) power, politics, and responsibility; (c) the legacy of historical trauma; (d) justice, equality, and forgiveness; and, (e) pedagogy of forgiveness. Interviews provided rich descriptions of their views on forgiveness as related to the conflict and their engagement with it. These findings provided new insights and discoveries about conceptions of forgiveness and the possibilities that forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness hold in conflict resolution.



Lastly, the interviews themselves, which reflect the voices from the heart of the conflict, offer opportunities for the reader to understand as fully as possible the human heart and its power of healing that is necessary to understand how one's perceived enemy can become one's partner in creating a world that practices moral human relations.

In the follow chapter, Chapter V, the results of these findings will be discussed to bring together theories and practices of forgiveness as related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I will provide an analysis of the findings and the impact they offer with regard to this study. I will also include implications and recommendations for further study.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE STORY**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I interpret the findings from the interviews, as addressed in Chapter IV, and analyze their relevance to the theoretical content of the literature review (Chapter II) and to the conceptual framework that underpins this study. I also address the research questions outlined in Chapter I in order to take a critical look at how the findings directly address or do not address the questions posed; further, how the findings relate to the study's problem statement.

As also stated in Chapter I, my choice to study forgiveness centered on developing an understanding of how forgiveness, regarded as a behavior, can heal and restore moral relations between individuals and among larger groups of people. This concept of restoration holds personal importance to my own conception of healing as well as to possibilities of healing for the greater world because it speaks to the human capacity to choose and enact desired behaviors. Secondly, I wanted to explore study subjects' understandings of forgiveness to determine whether or not it was common—among these particular participants—to regard forgiveness as an act of absolution for the wrongdoer and, if so, I wanted to identify those human capacities deemed necessary to create moral repair. Third, I set out to explore what I consider a fundamental connection between forgiveness, understood as a behavior, and social justice consciousness, thus

speaking to a moral and ethical relationship between the two that recognizes the humanity in all persons and the hope that most individuals would act accordingly. Lastly, my inquiry into if and how forgiveness can be taught adds another dimension to the role that forgiveness could play in our efforts to create moral relations and foster social justice consciousness. Such foundational concerns drove this study and contributed to the challenges of forgiveness that were highlighted in the findings chapter. Moreover, my focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—as the backdrop for this study of forgiveness—contributed to the challenges associated with understanding forgiveness as a behavior due to the conflict’s embedded historical and social aspects of causation and difficult reconciliation efforts. Throughout the study, it has been (and continues to be) important to take these challenges into consideration when seeking to understand individual notions of forgiveness in the context of this longstanding conflict.

It must be noted that my analyses and reflections on the study findings were written following a trip to the West Bank and Israel, a trip that occurred as an unexpected opportunity through a group of academic colleagues; in other words, not part of my original research planning process. Because of this trip, I had the opportunity to further explore the topic of forgiveness while living amongst people whose daily lives are subjected to the hardships and violence imposed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nonetheless, this chapter analysis is focally based on the findings reported in Chapter IV, even though my experiences from the trip have greatly influenced and reinforced a deeper, personal understanding of forgiveness as a behavior, along with an expanded perspective regarding the understanding that others have of forgiveness as a concept.

Given my personal interest in this conflict, I acknowledge my positionality within the analysis and argue that it ultimately gives participants' narratives deeper meaning, yet without compromising the integrity of the findings.

The remainder of this chapter is organized according to four of the five themes that were established in Chapter IV and again referenced below, that blends theoretical concepts with the experiences and views of participants. The fifth theme, pedagogy of forgiveness, will be addressed in a separate chapter, Chapter VI, instead of inclusion here. I also point out like and differing views of participants in order to provide a richness to my interpretative analysis of the findings. I end with a conclusion that provides an overall picture of the analysis that demonstrates the complexities of forgiveness as a theory and practice.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Before presenting my interpretations and analyses of study findings, I want to address a fundamental issue pertaining to the many ways in which forgiveness, as a concept, has historically been (and continues to be) variously understood and even contested at times. In fact, this issue emerged early in the study among the participants. As presented in Chapter IV, several interviewees requested clarification when asked to define forgiveness as they understood it, wanting to know if I had a set definition. I found this response to be indicative of what I previously termed the nebulousness of forgiveness. The interviewees' need for clarification before responding indicated to me that while forgiveness had a general familiarity, it possibly carried a personal concept specific to each of the participants. It seemed that despite its familiarity, universally the word

seemed to have various definitions. Therefore, as I developed the following analyses of the findings, it became clear that forgiveness is more likely rooted in personal notions and suppositions that have been internalized through cultural and religious understandings; yet, it is tested through behaviors related to experiences. Sometimes these notions and understandings of forgiveness align with our experiences while, at other times, they are in direct conflict with them, also contributing to the nebulous nature of forgiveness and its various definitions. However, in keeping with the purpose of this study—to explore understandings of forgiveness as a behavior that encompasses ethical human capacities and moral relationships that contribute to social justice consciousness—my intent here is to keep the focus on this purpose as opposed to reducing an exploration of forgiveness to a definition that can be reiterated with or without meaning.

To give credence to this viewpoint, I reference the work of Charles Griswold (2007), including his writings on historical notions of forgiveness that he explored across both interpersonal and political dimensions, each of which holds significance for this study. For example, because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has affected a worldview that spans both interpersonal and political dimensions, there may be an inability to separate what forgiveness means on a personal level from what it means on a political level. In addressing forgiveness on a personal level, several interviewees from all three populations (Israeli, Palestinian, American) spoke about times when they forgave a friend or a spouse for a wrongdoing. However, they saw forgiveness very differently when related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Forgiveness was not so easy to define or practice because of the depth of wrongdoing these people experienced either directly or

indirectly as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, a situation that has negatively affected the lives of so many Palestinians. The significance here is that while the overarching concept of forgiveness as a moral act or response to a wrongdoing is generally understood, this perspective of forgiveness may get lost when the wrongdoing is of much greater proportion. Griswold (2007) addressed this level of wrongdoing when he wrote about “moral evil” (p. xxv), questioning how forgiveness can be applied toward a wrongdoing of such magnitude. He used the term, “moral evil” (p. xxv) to underscore the significance in the challenge to accept that moral evil has occurred and at the same time to forgo retribution. This dichotomy, as he labeled this situation, is exactly what challenges forgiveness. I consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be situated at this depth of wrongdoing. In addition to the depth of wrongdoing (oppressive practices against the Palestinian population) I would add that the expansion of the occupation adds another dimension to the wrongdoing. Therefore, the conflict positioned this study of forgiveness as a possible testing ground upon which participants would be asked to consider behaviors—in light of their respective notions of forgiveness—that could lead to moral repair and social justice consciousness.

With regard to the analyses that follow, it is important to mention that I have chosen to refer to specific interviewees (and their comments) using first name and country of origin. With regard to country of origin, I have found that it is critical to understand the relationship between how and where one lives; in other words, how nationality and culture has impacted each study participant’s perspective on the conflict. Although, collectively, participants expressed support for ending the occupation, they

represent very different living situations that signal differences in how they experience the occupation—some are living as victims of the oppression, others are living as part of the oppressor culture, and others are living outside the situation, but looking in. In my role as researcher, I do not put any greater weight or validity on the responses by any one interviewee because of where he or she lives or one's cultural background, but I do think the differences in perspectives and worldviews are important.

In order to maintain a clear connection between the study findings and my analyses of them, I organized the following sections around the five identified thematic areas as outlined from the interviews in Chapter IV: (a) Forgiveness as a Humanistic Behavior; (b) Power, Politics, and Responsibility; (c) the Legacy of Historical Trauma; and (d) Justice, Equality, and Forgiveness; (e) Pedagogy of Forgiveness. In the first four summary sections, I provide conclusions as related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this chapter. I will reserve the fifth theme, Pedagogy of Forgiveness, to be addressed as its own chapter, Chapter VI, where I will include the perspectives of the interviewees.

### **Forgiveness as a Humanistic Behavior**

I begin this section based on a premise taken from the work of Lévinas (1985), as introduced in Chapter II; that is, as humans, we are responsible for the Other as soon as we see the Other's face. Therefore, the practice of moral relationships would be considered an inherent part of human existence based on this responsibility. It follows, then, that forgiveness would be seen as a phenomenon of human existence involving far more than what is or can be simply believed. Rather, on this view, it encompasses what is lived and, therefore, creates the foundation of forgiveness as a humanistic behavior. This

premise informs my overarching recognition of study participants' acknowledgment of their own human capacities, along with their ability to acknowledge similar capacities in others. In other words, although each interviewee provided personal concepts of forgiveness that varied from one another, what was consistent across their responses was the importance of humanity and its recognition within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This concern for the human condition was the essential point or feature of forgiveness that emerged from these interviews despite the range of concepts that attach to it—from being only a word to being an essential component of moral relations. To reiterate, what remained consistent was an understanding that forgiveness represents a commitment to human dignity.

Secondly, it is significant to point out that for those living in Israel and Palestine, both areas are geographically small, yet densely populated. However, there are physical borders and barriers throughout the land that are intended to keep people apart, making it difficult to experience the kind of humanism that each interviewee named as the solution to the conflict. These physical borders and barriers are joined with laws that disallow movement between borders and are intensified by a daily military presence of enforcement maintained by Israeli soldiers. I include this description to provide the reader with a vision that contrasts with interviewees' statements on humanism and their collective belief in the need for ethics of forgiveness. I am suggesting that it is necessary to provide a more complete picture of the conditions under which people in this region live, especially the Palestinian people living under the rule of Israeli occupation, in order to better appreciate study participants' experiences and humanistic sensibilities. We must



use our imaginations to fully understand and honor the challenges that those living in this area of the world—here, Palestinians and Israelis—face while promoting humanism and reconciliation.

To support the impact of barriers on human contact, introduced in Chapter II, Eisikovitz (2004) wrote specifically about the wall that Israel continues to build to separate Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine. The wall blocks exposure to each other and, therefore, the individual's concept of the other is left up to the imagination. Given the history of violence between Israel and Palestine, each country's notion about the other is reduced to that of enemy, a notion fed by media and other sources seeking political gain from the conflict. Eisikovitz made the point that human-to-human contact is necessary in order for empathy and sympathy for the other to be cultivated and practiced. In turn, he named "moral blindness" (Eisikovitz, 2004, p. 49) as the concept that allows us to act towards others as if what we do has no impact on another. The wall that Israel is building restricts people from seeing each other as having similar human qualities and recognizing likenesses that they share. From this perspective, I suggest that the wall has served to inhibit interviewees' capacities to embrace forgiveness as an intentionally chosen humanistic behavior even though their interview responses reflected their fundamental belief in human dignity for all.

This vision of the other as having human qualities was raised as essential to human dignity in interviewees' descriptions, from all three populations. This vision was especially important to those interviewees who had experienced loss due to the conflict and were committed to ending the violence. For Bassam (Palestinian) and Rami (Israeli),

their dedication to actively promote the need for human treatment of others followed the killing of each one's daughter by the other side. Although both men were living different lifestyles and experiences—based on their nationalities/political loyalties—prior to the death of their daughters, their individual healing processes seemed to be driven by a deep respect for humanity following the tragedies. Rami, who spoke of living in a “bubble,” and being in a “jail of prejudice” stemming from the Holocaust, described a way of life in which the conflict remained hidden from his day-to-day activities, seeming to keep him from acknowledging the effects of the conflict on his day to day existence as an Israeli. I posit that it might be difficult to understand how anyone living in a country where daily violent acts are commonplace can describe his life as living in a bubble. However, I suggest that it would be far more difficult for people living under oppressive conditions, such as the Palestinians, to live in bubbles.

Bassam, on the other hand, grew up in occupied territory with imposed limitations on every aspect of his life, surrounded by Israeli soldiers on a daily basis. He spoke of taking part in resistance activities without knowing why, except that this was part of daily living. His experiences were very different from Rami's, having spent seven years in prison that included ongoing beatings by Israeli soldiers. It was in prison, however—through a relationship with a jailer—that Bassam first talked about hearing the meaningful words from a perceived enemy, “I am just like you.” Other events in the prison, such as watching the movie *Schindler's List* brought to Bassam an awareness of his capacity for empathy, even though he was living under such oppressive conditions. Watching the horrific treatment of Jews by Germans transcended his feelings about his

own abuse at the hands of Jews. Instead, feelings of compassion and empathy emerged within him for those who, in his current experience, were enemies. I found this experience of Bassam's to be very profound as he was able to experience such a deep capacity towards and understanding of humanism even in the throes of abuse and violence. Bassam's capacity to feel empathy for the other (i.e., an Israeli or Jewish person) was unexpected and surprising, given his experiences growing up in occupied territory and being imprisoned and beaten at the hands of the Israeli army. I wondered how someone with his history could feel empathy towards his abusers, especially empathy as understood in the context of the theories included in this research.

To help us understand, I again turn to writings on empathy by Hoffman (1981), Moore (1990), and Novitz (1998)—whose theories were introduced in Chapter II—and agreed that empathy requires the individual to respond to another's distress (or joy) while having less of a focus on oneself or one's situation. To illustrate, Bassam revealed that he cried when he watched *Schindler's List*, suggesting that he felt sympathy for the Jews depicted in the movie despite the fact that Israelis (i.e., Jews) were now causing his pain. Novitz (1998) addressed this very circumstance, stating that empathy does not come naturally, but has to be developed through "prevailing cultural values" (p. 309). If this is true, I suggest that it indicates a couple of insights about empathy. First, people have the capacity to feel empathy towards others regardless of their personal pain and circumstances. Secondly, empathy can be instilled in populations living amidst violence and oppression.

The overarching commonality for both Rami and Bassam, regardless of their very different experiences and worldviews—one from an occupied population and one from an occupier population—was the killing of their daughters as a result of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Rami, the tragedy brought about a transformation in how he was living his life in Israel where, one may say, his bubble had been burst. He was no longer able to ignore the conflict that surrounded him and his family. Consequently, he chose to become a member of the Bereaved Parents' Circle where he met Bassam, whom he now refers to as his brother. Their work together has melded into a cause for fostering humanitarian relationships and the elimination of hate towards others. Ultimately, they have chosen to take the same path toward humanization and reconciliation as a way to work through their grief, overriding the realities of their very different beginnings. The significance of their stories lies in the fact that Rami and Bassam share an unwavering commitment to treating others with the human dignity that all human beings deserve. Their stories dispel any notions that a worldview of social consciousness belongs only to those whose experiences have been cloaked in loving, peaceful relations with others.

Although both Bassam and Rami share a strong commitment to ending the occupation and promoting human dignity and social justice through their work with the Bereaved Parent's Circle, their views on forgiveness are very different. Rami struggled with expressing his concept of forgiveness, stating that he did not understand it, especially in reference to forgiving the killing of children and oppression of others. He does not see his current work as part of forgiveness; rather, it is "going on with living." It may be interpreted that Rami's concept of forgiveness is solely about the wrongdoer

being relieved of responsibility for the wrongdoing. This perspective makes sense in conjunction with the view he expressed about Germany and its role in the Holocaust, that Germany was a “cursed culture” and “cursed people.” Rami also expressed that he did not feel that he had to ask for forgiveness for his part as an Israeli soldier when he “had blood on my hands.” He did not address how he viewed his responsibility as an aggressor while serving as an Israeli soldier, but this time spent in military service—for him—did not warrant forgiveness.

In contrast, Bassam indicated that he had a very deep understanding of forgiveness that comes from his culture and religious teachings. He was able to connect Muslim religious teachings to a reverence for humanity, seeing both Muslim belief and respect for humanity as indistinguishable. In relation to his personal healing, forgiveness for Bassam was necessary in order for him to move on with life following the death of his daughter. He talked of forgiveness as a position of strength and a way of life. As a position of strength, forgiveness is an interesting concept. Murphy touched on this view of forgiveness as a position of strength when he wrote, and I paraphrase, that one who cannot forgive also cannot have friends or lovers (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). In this respect, forgiveness opens the heart to healing and fully experiencing human qualities as we interact with each other. This is how Bassam described his willingness to forgive. Interestingly, this concept of forgiveness, as a position of strength, is the opposite of what I will address in a later section of my analyses, titled the Legacy of Historical Trauma, that suggests forgiveness may be seen as a weakness.

Similar to concepts of forgiveness as expressed by other interviewees such as Avner and Gideon, Bassam did not consider forgiveness as something given in order to absolve the wrongdoer from responsibility. He considered absolution of wrongdoing as mercy and not forgiveness. Bassam's concept of mercy mirrored Murphy's writings on mercy in which he linked mercy directly to the accountability and punishment of the wrongdoer (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Murphy actually made the point that mercy may not determine that justice be set aside. Bassam's responses reflected Murphy's concept of mercy in that he would not grant mercy to his daughter's killer and, in contrast, worked with the system to ensure that the Israeli soldier was brought before the courts for his crime. Bassam also talked of forgiveness as a type of revenge against the wrongdoer who would expect him to fight instead of forgive. This distinction was important to Bassam as he spoke about Palestinian men being seen as terrorists, and, therefore, assumed fighters.

Similarly, through his work with *Breaking the Silence*, the organization that brings awareness of the Israeli army's oppression of Palestinians through testimonies and pictures, former Israeli soldier, Avner, has sought to bring awareness to the people of Israel of the harsh actions of the Israeli army. One can assume from his efforts that Avner had hope that once Israelis witnessed the destruction caused by their government, feelings of empathy and sympathy and other aspects of humanism would prevail. Specifically, the goal behind Avner's role in *Breaking the Silence* is that of ending the occupation of Palestine and the denial of human rights for the Palestinian people. Confirming that he knew his actions, as a soldier, were inhumane and oppressive, Avner explained that his sense of responsibility for his actions became the turning point for his

rejection of what he termed an “abnormal reality” as an Israeli soldier and the injustice of his government’s actions.

As a point of comparison, Avner’s background was similar to Rami’s in that he was raised in Israel in an Orthodox Jewish family where Jewish values were stressed. Avner’s earliest memory of experiencing social injustice came when former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was assassinated in 1995 (referenced in Chapter IV). With tears in their eyes, his parents awoke Avner and his brother with the news. Taken as a sign of empathy, his parents’ reaction to the death of Rabin most likely reflected how the family viewed others and how they instilled and nurtured an awareness of empathy in their children. Their support of Rabin, who was a lead negotiator of Oslo II that would result in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza, indicates a sense of social justice that the family held. As a student at the time of the assassination, Avner also described how many of his classmates celebrated the death of the former prime minister, and he realized then that he was different from his classmates and considered himself a humanist.

Although Avner held a strong conviction to uphold social justice and preserve human dignity, he did not see forgiveness as being connected to this stance. He saw forgiveness as having no place in the conflict until the occupation ended. To clarify, Avner considered forgiveness from a more traditional point of view, meaning that it is an apologetic behavior following a wrongdoing. His concept of forgiveness also seemed to indicate that once forgiveness is given, the wrongdoing will not be repeated, which gives forgiveness an additional responsibility. He explained this viewpoint with the example of

his rejection of being forgiven for “barging into other peoples’ homes” as a soldier, stating that while he may be forgiven, another soldier could come along and take over the family’s home again. For Avner, forgiveness seemed to indicate an apology for the wrongdoing, along with a commitment to not repeat the offense.

Underscoring Avner’s view is Urban-Walker’s (2006) concept of forgiveness as repair without returning to the status quo. However, I posit that there may be trouble with this view if we consider there are no guarantees that wrongdoing will not be repeated. Misztal (2003) also agreed that in cases of political reconciliation, forgiveness must accompany changes in political structures (i.e., the occupation of Palestine); however, reconciliation may not guarantee forgiveness. Ultimately, with regard to Avner, I interpreted his understanding of empathy—along with his capacity to forgive or accept forgiveness—to orient in the same way that Palestinians cannot be expected to feel empathy (or even entertain forgiveness) for the Israelis until the occupation ends, a perspective that is contrary to many other interviewees.

In contrast to Avner’s concept of empathy and forgiveness, Sa’ed, who grew up in Palestine as a Muslim and attended Quaker schools, expressed a very different view of empathy and forgiveness. As a result of his experiences growing up, he described a personal worldview by which all humans have capacities for both evil and good. Sa’ed asserted that recognizing humanity is a “fundamental human equality and access to human rights for everyone.” As a gay man, Muslim, and Palestinian, he has experienced oppression on many different fronts, but still declared his belief in human dignity as something that can overcome all oppressive practices. He shared that he has witnessed



the transformation of individuals who previously held prejudicial beliefs about others to become advocates for equality and human rights. As a professor, his teaching reflects this belief. As interviewer/researcher, I interpreted Sa'ed's responses to manifest a direct connection between his concept of forgiveness and his ability to see others as having humanitarian ethics and values despite the current political climate within the conflict. For him, then, forgiveness would be interpreted as a quality that recognizes the humanity in everyone.

Sa'ed's view of forgiveness represents exactly the concept that I have termed "ethics of forgiveness" in this study. Within his narrative, he distinctly placed these ethics—empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, trust—at the cornerstone of forgiveness and moral relations. Further, he named the capacity for good and evil as a human concept, as I have named these ethics of forgiveness as human capacities, making our beliefs and behaviors a matter of choice depending on our ability to see others as human with human frailties.

Similarly, the concept of forgiveness as a humanitarian behavior was most significant in my interview with Maha. While I tried to weigh each interview equally, Maha's concept of forgiveness and humanity had a great impact on me because of her daily living circumstances. Unlike other interviewees, Maha routinely lived under extreme conditions of deprivation of the most basic resources. Residing in the Gaza Strip, her electricity was cut off without warning, and she was denied movement outside of the Gaza Strip boundaries where medical and other services could be obtained. Water was withheld, as were other necessities, simply because she is a Palestinian. Her ability to

separate humanity from political will was remarkable, although she understood how anger and retribution could overshadow seeing others with compassion and empathy. More than anyone—because of the isolation forced upon her—Maha expressed hope for change, and that change will be made when people are allowed to connect with each other to form human relations.

I return to the work of Eisikovits (2004) who wrote on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the physical barriers that will not allow human contact between people from both Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine. Negative concepts of *the other* are developed by those in power who create scenarios that promote the need for barriers in order to maintain safety from the enemy. Maha's story about the Israeli taxi driver with whom she had a conversation illustrates how one individual's prescribed view of the other can be changed through human connection. Following their conversation, the driver revealed that he imagined all Palestinians to be terrorists, and how this concept changed for him following their exchange. In addition to her hopeful responses, Maha shared her own feelings of anger and despair as also part of being human. However, she affirmed her ability to recognize that retribution through violence will not stop the conflict nor the occupation.

Maha shared that she is engaged in peaceful activities in her community and noted the absence of any discussions regarding forgiveness. When allowed to leave Gaza, as permission must be granted by Israel, she meets with groups in other countries that are also working towards an end to the occupation of Palestine territories. She brings an awareness of daily living conditions within an occupied territory and speaks out against

retribution and promotes an understanding of resolution of the conflict based on humanistic principles. She expressed her belief that there cannot be peace without forgiveness, which for her means reconciling with the past and focusing on the future. She included the need to educate Palestinian youth in order to deter them from radical behaviors and provide them with resources to create better lives for themselves. Maha also stated her belief that the Israeli people need to reconcile their past with regard to the Holocaust. In contrast with Avner's concept of forgiveness as not being considered until the occupation ends, Maha's view is that forgiveness is/should be part of the process for ending the conflict, which is driven by the occupation. Overall, interviewees' responses illustrate that there is a divide among those who share goals of ending the occupation as to whether or not forgiveness can or should be given while the occupation exists. Certainly, both Avner and Gideon (who I will address next) indicate it should not, mainly because of the level of wrongdoing or the "moral evil" (Griswold, 2007) that may be too excessive to be forgiven.

Gideon's view of forgiveness, as it pertains to current Israeli policies, is similar to Avner's stand that forgiveness is not possible while the occupation of Palestine by the Israeli government continues. Gideon maintained that Israelis do not view Palestinians as "equal human beings" and, therefore, they justify the occupation of an entire population on this basis. He described the occupation as dehumanizing, stating his belief that there can be no justice as long as Palestinian's are viewed in this manner. Gideon actually denied any relevance of this situation to the concept of forgiveness and added that neither

side will forgive the other. Therefore, in terms of Gideon's point of view, there is little evidence or hope that this will happen.

I wish to point out an irony here before continuing with additional testimonies on forgiveness as a humanitarian behavior. Through my study subjects, I find it ironic that the two most aggressive voices against the occupation are Israelis (Avner and Gideon) while the Palestinians (Maha and Bassam) who are living under oppressive conditions, voice their opposition through humanitarian and peaceful means. Both Avner and Gideon put forth a view of forgiveness as a behavior that takes place following a wrongdoing; as such, they were unable to conceive of forgiveness as having a role in peace efforts. The other commonality with both is that they have dedicated their work to speaking out against the Israeli government in order to end the occupation. As a result, they have been consistently labeled by the Israeli government, and some Israelis, as traitors who have adopted a stance against the existence of Israel. In contrast, although Bassam, Rami, and Maha continue to engage in similar work to end the occupation, they do view forgiveness as a behavior that embraces empathy, sympathy, love, benevolence, etc.; human capacities that need to be nurtured and practiced regardless of whether or not the occupation exists. In their work, by emphasizing the importance of empathy, sympathy, trust, humanism, and forgiveness as humanistic tools for ending the conflict, they do not receive the kind of opposition from the Israeli government as do Avner and Gideon. I find this response ironic as the Israeli government obviously views the opposition tactics of Avner and Gideon far more threatening than those tactics of the Palestinians who espouse public opposition through humanistic messaging. It is interesting to me that the

Israeli government does not view the voices of humanism as threatening and may somehow consider humanism as benign in its ability to oppose government behavior.

As researcher, I conclude in this case that when the process of opposing the occupation includes efforts driven by ethics of forgiveness and reasoning based on human dignity, the threat to those in power appears less than when the opposition is perceived as using aggressive tactics. I base this analysis on the contrast in efforts to end the occupation as represented by these study participants. Avner's work exposes the harsh consequences of Israeli army tactics on Palestinians for purposes of proving the devastation caused to families and their homes. Gideon's writings in the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, and his various speaking engagements also expose the horrors of the occupation and consistently name the Israeli government as perpetrator of these crimes. He has received many death threats as a result of his writings. The level of threat to those in power (i.e., governments and ruling authorities) seems to be heightened when challenged through efforts such as these while, on the other hand, they seem to be less reactive or threatened in response to efforts based on humanitarian principles. The effectiveness of these differences in approaches to ending oppression is worth debating. However, I would argue that efforts that include humanitarian principles and ethics of forgiveness have the potential for greater impact because there is less opposition and threat to the power structures. To reiterate what Bassam previously expressed, there is an expectation that he will fight and by choosing forgiveness, it quells a response of aggression. Hampton also emphasized this point when she wrote on retributive justice; that it must include a recognition of moral human consideration (Murphy & Hampton,

1988). To this point, Bassam worked for justice by demanding his daughter's murderer be tried in the courts as opposed to taking any retaliatory action.

This point of recognizing and affirming moral human consideration is also emphasized through the work accomplished by Yitzhak following the death of his son in the conflict. As opposed to retaliation, he brought families from both sides face to face in order to experience the humanness that exists in all people, even those perceived as enemies. These tactics were effective in exposing a realization of human likenesses that include empathy and compassion, and which led to the creation of the Bereaved Parents' Circle. Although humans share likenesses in physical appearance and biological capabilities, situations involving human conflict seem to cover these likenesses from sight, also concealing other human qualities from recognition and leaving beliefs centered on differences and myths about each other. Of importance in Yitzhak's responses to considering forgiveness as a humanistic behavior, he made the distinction between forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness. He maintained that forgiveness requires that whatever was taken or wronged can be repaid or rebuilt. Of course, taking a life cannot be undone, so he would not grant forgiveness for his son's murder. At the same time, he expressed feelings of empathy and sympathy for the Palestinian people as he continued to work toward achieving an end to the occupation.

Similarly, Max and Daniel—both American teachers—stressed the importance of seeing the other through a human lens and challenging negative beliefs about diverse people and other cultures. Rabbi Michael also made this point by stating that when there is no forgiveness, when we cannot see the other's human qualities, we become no

different from those that we perceive as enemies. I find this to be a profound statement, especially as it addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In particular, it speaks to the question, “How can Israel, whose people have historically been treated without human consideration—void of empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love—treat others in a similarly unjust way?” If one accepts this view of forgiveness, it points to a stark contrast with Yitzhak’s view, suggesting that Yitzhak, who will not forgive, holds the same worldview of those he opposes. I do not believe this to be true about Yitzhak, as I interpret a sharp distinction between his definition of forgiveness and his view of humanity. Further, I reiterate my view that the disparities in how people view themselves and others more accurately addresses the nebulousness of forgiveness in terms of trying to define and apply it rather than its relationship to humanity. I believe that Rabbi Michael would agree with my interpretation as he has ultimately argued that there is more importance typically placed on compassion for each other than on forgiveness as a behavior of intention and purpose, again emphasizing its nebulous definition. If we view our responsibility to the Other without expectation of reciprocity, as Lévinas (1985) wrote, by engaging in moral relations, what we term forgiveness may be less important than living out our responsibility to the Other; that is, treating others with the dignity and respect deserved simply as human beings. I make this point not to condemn one’s view of forgiveness, such as that of Yitzhak, but more importantly to judge one’s behavior towards another. Given this view, forgiveness may more practically be considered a personal definition rather than the way in which we treat others which, in my view, emphasizes the importance of affirming ethics of forgiveness.

I turn to the issue of retribution with regard to considering forgiveness as a humanistic behavior—mostly because of its emphasis within definitions of forgiveness as expressed by several theorists presented in Chapter II. The question raised by several theorists was whether or not anger or resentment must be eliminated in order for forgiveness to be practiced. Further, the relationship between anger and retaliation has been explored in theoretical writings. Griswold (2007) framed forgiveness as a task that separates anger from retaliation, important in our ability to create trusting relationships. Murphy determined that forgiveness cannot take place when there are “excesses of resentment” (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 17), yet did not define “excesses.”

Issues of anger and the need for retribution are woven into discussions of forgiveness as if they are inseparable. Anger at a wrongdoing can be considered a human and justified emotion whereas retribution is a behavior driven by anger and resentment. In their discussion of Aristotle and Bishop Joseph Butler, both Griswold (2007) and Murphy (Murphy & Hampton, 1988) posited that anger at a wrongdoing actually demonstrates a level of self-respect following a wrongdoing. All of the interviewees shared the view that although anger and resentment are warranted, retribution is not. Their point about self-respect is based on a belief by both Aristotle and Butler that if one feels anger at a wrongdoing, the anger is indicative that the victim of the wrongdoing acknowledges that he/she does not deserve to be treated in such a way, and, as such, has a sense of self-respect. I see this feeling of anger as separate from retribution in that anger is a human feeling that is separate from a behavior of retaliation. While Avner and Gideon did not see the Israeli government as worthy of forgiveness, they also did not



support the view that retribution would be a valid choice to end the occupation. Both expressed strong commitments to extending humanitarian behavior towards the wrongdoer, even when in disagreement with their practices. However, they did not make a connection on these points when specifically responding to questions about forgiveness.

We also see this struggle in Simon Wiesenthal's dilemma as told in *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. In this book, Wiesenthal (1995) related a true story that occurred during his time spent as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. He was taken to the bedside of a Nazi soldier who asked Wiesenthal, as a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, to grant him forgiveness as he lie dying. Wiesenthal refused to utter the words, "I forgive you," but at the same time, he forswore retribution by not killing the dying soldier when he had the opportunity nor by denigrating the soldier in the eyes of his mother when he met her following the war. Wiesenthal (1995) wrote that he felt a sense of guilt over not granting forgiveness to the Nazi soldier. Griswold's (2007) statement made above on moral evil is fitting here in that for Wiesenthal, it was the experience of moral evil that came in direct conflict with the Jewish tenets of forgiveness. The depth of the moral evil of the Holocaust caused greater conflict than the dichotomy of which Griswold wrote, but nevertheless, caused an internal struggle that Wiesenthal could not personally resolve. Possibly, the humanitarian behavior shown was through not retaliating (by killing the soldier) when he had the opportunity, or possibly, the retaliation was seen in refusing to forgive and, therefore, fulfilling the dying wish of the soldier. I see here both humanitarian principles being carried out by sparing the

soldier's life and by preserving his mother's chosen reality about her son, and at the same time, withholding the last wish of the soldier—that he be shown forgiveness by a Jew.

Similarly, I weave in Murphy's writing on mercy, specifically as he points out that mercy may indicate an absolving of accountability for wrongdoing (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Although he did not use the word mercy, Wiesenthal (1995) may have considered forgiving the soldier as an act of mercy and not forgiveness, thereby not willing to absolve the soldier of accountability for his part in the Holocaust even though he would not live. Bassam made this distinction when he stated he would not grant mercy to the murderer of his daughter, but would forgive, as forgiveness was for Bassam and his healing. Returning to the issue of retribution, it can be viewed in various ways such as in not granting mercy and withholding forgiveness. The main point here is that retribution does not necessarily need to include violence against the wrongdoer, but can take other forms.

Griswold (2007) similarly addressed the forswearing of retribution as acceptance of a past that cannot be changed; that, in essence, responses to past events are under one's control and represent choices. I would argue here that the choice of forswearing retribution may be, in itself, a demonstration of forgiveness regardless of whether or not an apology has been given. Although theorists like Griswold and others perceive forgiveness as avoiding retribution, those interviewed for this study said very little about retribution. Instead, they focused on one's individual perception and worldview of others. Therefore, I conclude that the forswearing of retribution may very well fit into theoretical

concepts of forgiveness and certainly seem logical. However, in practice, retribution was not related to forgiveness according to interviewees' responses.

Lastly, it is important to take a critical look at the human emotion of anger, which is present in the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians. Anger is central to responses of wrongdoing as referenced by Sadler (2009) in his discussion of Aristotle's view of anger. Although anger was not specifically mentioned in interviewees' responses, one might assume that anger—as a human capacity of intense emotion—must have been present following wrongdoings. I include the following examples of highly intense situations that could have provoked acts of anger and rage, as related by several interviewees: (a) Sa'ed's experience of being put in an Israeli prison when simply trying to visit his family in the Gaza Strip over Christmas of 2015, (b) Bassam's and Rami's feelings over the killing of their daughters, and (c) Yitzhak's feelings in response to the killing of his son. In contrast to Aristotle's writings in which he described failure to feel anger at a wrongdoing as a lack of self-respect, I am suggesting that Sa'ed's, Bassam's, and Rami's expression of self-respect have been witnessed through their work in promoting human rights, as opposed to engaging in retaliatory behavior based in anger. As such, the commitment to social justice practices based on humanitarian worldviews continues in spite of the anger that has been/continues to be experienced. I interpret this to mean that forgiveness is possible even when justified anger is felt.

To close this section on forgiveness as a humanistic behavior, regardless of each interviewee's definition of forgiveness and its application, the commitment to seeing others as having human qualities and deserving of moral treatment was evident among all.

Certainly, based on the research and the findings of this study, I propose that ethics of forgiveness are necessary elements to be affirmed in terms of how we must perceive and behave towards others if our mutual goal is social justice and peace. Compassion, empathy, sympathy, love, patience, humility, and justice were all included in interviewees' responses to ending the conflict between Israel and Palestine and building social justice consciousness.

### **Power, Politics, and Responsibility**

As stated in Chapter III, I wanted to learn about the worldviews of others, specifically within the contexts of this study of forgiveness, and how these views affect relations with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this section, I explore how power structures and politics influence one's worldview; specifically, a worldview that incorporates personal safety and the ability to perceive others as human beings.

The greatest challenges to ending the occupation, as identified by the interviewees, are the Israeli government's current policies and practices that drive the increase in illegal land acquisitions in order to build Israeli settlements. Those interviewed advocated rational efforts to promote moral relations and principles of humanism as their tools to end the occupation. At the same time, the Israeli government continues to wield its power by reminding Israelis and the rest of the world of the historical persecution and annihilation of Jews, a tactic intended to deter questioning of the government's actions. In other words, tactics similar to this one, instills fear that promotes the need for protection from enemies—Palestinians—at all costs. Similar to the secular story of David and Goliath (the weaker, David, defeats the giant, Goliath, by hitting him with a stone),

one can envision the disparity between the tools, tactics, and numbers employed by a government bent on instilling fear in the masses—using military might to maintain its power—versus the smaller pockets of efforts intended to promote compassion and humane approaches to dealing with the conflict. Further, there is a current reality to this story as news reports show Palestinian children throwing rocks at the Israeli military who respond with gun fire.

Several interviewees questioned where forgiveness fits into such a political struggle. As researcher, I interpret the imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine as being what has led to this presenting question: Where does forgiveness fit into this scenario? Moreover, the realities of everyday life, on a local level, also impact one's view of the world within this overarching framework of conflict. On the Palestinian side, interviewees expressed much criticism of Hamas, the democratically elected leadership in Gaza, that is blamed for terrorist attacks against Israel. Israeli interviewees were also critical of Hamas, but there is a difference here that I want to point out. While the Israeli government blames Hamas for Israel's need to continue its oppressive and violent practices against Palestinians in order to preserve the security of Israeli citizens, Israeli and Palestinian interviewees who have lost children in the conflict reject these killings as justification for violence on Israel. Instead, they blame a lack of recognition of the humanity and moral capacities in each other. Maybe this answers the question of where forgiveness fits into a political struggle.

Many participants agreed that power is what influences the worldview of a particular group toward others. In this conflict, beliefs about the other (they are out to

destroy us) are reinforced by the power structures. As Rami stated, Israelis are provided one view of the conflict by the Israeli government in military preparation for Israelis to sacrifice themselves for Israel. This brainwashing (Rami's words) is, in my view, Israeli government leaders using their power to tap into the deepest fears of Israelis and their well-being. He further stated that when there is an act of violence by Palestinians, an immediate response from Israel is that the country is under attack causing increased fear. He added that Netanyahu (current Israeli Prime Minister) uses this fear as a tool to inflame the conflict and continue the occupation. In other words, the ongoing message is that if oppressive practices are not instilled, complete destruction of Israel will result. To this point, the Israeli government's use of power to instill fear has been very effective as the wall continues to be built, and Israeli settlements continue to take over Palestinian lands.

Regarding the influence of power structures, I reference the work of Halperin et al. (2013), introduced in Chapter II, in which the authors addressed a study of power structures specifically in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The research team found a direct correlation between anger towards Palestinians and support for aggressive policies employed by the Israeli government. Thus, I suggest that it comes as no surprise that the Israeli government views peace efforts, especially those related to high-profile causes such as *Breaking the Silence* or the writings and international talks given by Gideon, as threatening to their power structure. Similarly, J. Turner's (2005) exploration of the nature of influence and power found that power leads to control of resources. It is

this control of resources that peace groups argue is the true reason for the occupation of Palestine, as opposed to a necessity of safety for which the Israeli government argues.

In contrast, Bassam and Avner expressed the opinion that even with all of its military power and other means of support given to Israel, the country still does not feel safe, as witnessed by the taking of Palestinian land. On this point, Sa'ed, a Palestinian, talked about the most powerful military force in the Middle East (Israel) seeing itself as fragile. On the Palestinian side, it was pointed out that Hamas, the governing body of the Gaza Strip elected to bring peace, has not been able to make Palestinians safe. Current power structures and all military efforts have not been effective in ending the conflict as evidenced in the continued bloodshed and acts of oppression. As evidenced in the participants' responses, having power did not equate with being safe. Blood continues to be shed on both sides, which is responded to by an increase in violence.

As related to humanitarian efforts, several spoke of power taking over humanity, and they agreed that it doesn't matter who has the power or which side has the power, but that power used to oppress will not serve humanitarian efforts. Maha spoke of how power structures cannot be diminished, especially as communities are fractured and people become more individualized. She characterized this fracturing and abuse of power as causing a loss of hope in people of both Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine. She spoke of how Hamas, democratically elected, was touted as the entity that would lead Palestine to peace. However, once in power, the promises of this group were not carried out. Fracturing continues and results in less human contact, which in turn means the less people will be able to see the humanity in each other, especially those perceived as

enemies. The high cement walls built by the Israeli government, intended to divide the Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine, stand as testimony to Israel's efforts to keep people from interacting.

Structures, whether cement walls that separate people or government policies that oppress people and disallow social connections, are what Young (2006) referred to as "structures of injustice" (p. 114) that are morally wrong in treatment of others. She viewed social connectedness as a foundation for and the responsibility of promoting justice, which is negated as these walls continue to be built. These structures are also barriers to practices of social justice in that one group of people does not have the advantages enjoyed by those on the other side, as Miller (1999) described. In this case, Palestinians do not enjoy advantages of amenities of daily living such as electricity, water, building materials, and other resources readily available to Israeli citizens. Living behind walls and forbidding the freedom to move outside cement walls symbolizes blatant social injustice based on one's heritage and symbolized by the political power structures at play.

Given the commentary about power and power structures, I questioned whether power had any positive qualities, or was it just used to oppress others? As opposed to providing an answer to this question, Avner posed similar questions as he talked about individual groups forming because members have been marginalized and excluded. For example, as I wrote earlier, he cited how certain racial and ethnic groups form and exclude those who are not of the same race or ethnicity. As such, he questioned if any group that excludes others can be considered practicing equality, or are they simply building tiny empires? I suggest that the word empire connotes a power structure



regardless of its size and/or purpose if it is grounded in exclusionary practices. This would be an interesting issue for more study; that is, taking a look at the effect of exclusionary practices with groups that formed as a result of their members being excluded. If it is justified to exclude or oppress others based on the exclusionary group having been victimized itself (historical treatment of Jews), this view would give Israel justification for its practices.

The taking of power was not always seen as abusive or limited to the Israeli government. Several interviewees also addressed the potential for creating positive power through forgiveness, the power that people have when they are able to build and maintain human relations of equality. A number of them looked at forgiveness as accepting a person's mistakes, which is a recognition of both human capacities and frailties. Although there was agreement that the occupation must stop—only considered possible through a change in political policy—there remained a belief that humanitarian efforts, through forgiveness, is a meaningful way to create change. Sa'ed stated that although practices of forgiveness are challenged while the occupation is in place, efforts to continue to promote forgiveness and ethics of forgiveness are needed. He spoke of opening our hearts as humans in order to challenge the current power structures.

Comments concerning the need for greater political action efforts around the world that would put pressure on those forces feeding Israel's oppressive practices were interwoven among interviewees' insights into conflict resolution. Several pointed out the role of the United States in contributing to these oppressive practices through the amount of funding given to Israel annually, much of which is used in military operations against

Palestinians. It was also noted that there has been a lack of intervention on the part of the United States to demand that Israel stop their human rights violations. Daniel specifically spoke of the millions of dollars that the U.S. annually sends to Israel, which is used in its military aggression against Palestinians. As a citizen of the U.S., I admit to feeling responsibility for my government's actions and felt compelled to take actions to address the issue. These actions included becoming involved in organizations that expose oppressive practices such as Jewish Voice for Peace. This puts a global outlook to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that I viewed more as a domino effect of responsibility that goes beyond a conflict between two territories across the ocean.

My interview questions centered on if or how interviewees perceived forgiveness as being able to change a worldview held by Israel that military force was essential to its survival. I asked this because so many were involved in efforts that focused on seeing others as human beings deserving of respect and moral relations. Several interviewees expressed the opinion that practices of forgiveness are decided on a personal level while the conflict operates on a political level, suggesting that the political machine has greater influence over people's worldviews. They spoke of power as trumping acts of humanism and, therefore, overcoming our capacities to show care and compassion for others.

However, I assert that in order for those who are leading humanitarian efforts in Israel and Palestine to move forward, there must be a belief that people will eventually see each other as human beings; further, that they will be able to put structures in place that reflect social justice consciousness. From these accounts, there seems to be a belief that power

structures can change when people choose to change their beliefs and behaviors. This belief is the impetus behind efforts such as the Bereaved Parents' Circle.

For two of the Israeli interviewees, the wrongdoer who takes responsibility for committing oppressive acts against another (or against a population) brought a renewed recognition of others as human beings deserving of treatment with human dignity. As noted earlier in the chapter, for years, Rami avoided addressing the Holocaust in which members of his family were victims. Bassam encouraged Rami to accompany him to Germany to visit Holocaust camp sites, and it was during this trip that Rami realized there is hope to move beyond the horrors of the atrocities committed by the German people. He spoke of seeing how Germany is taking responsibility for its past by educating German young people on their country's role in the Holocaust. This experience of seeing Germany take responsibility was a transforming experience for Rami, rooted in a belief in humanity, people, and hope for change. The crimes of the Holocaust were beyond human imagination. Yet, by exposing its role and ensuring that such a legacy of wrongdoing would not be repeated or passed on to its young people, I posit that Germany's actions follow the tenets of forgiveness. This transformation is an example of the accountability that Griswold (2007) included in his writings on forgiveness.

Murphy also addressed justifications for forgiveness, explained in Chapter II, with accountability being one (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). While there were five justifications covered in Murphy's discussion, here I include one that is particularly relevant to Rami's view on Germany. For example, a justification that has significance to this research includes the wrongdoer having a change of heart and the wrongdoer

admitting to the wrong, thereby showing accountability. Rami experienced the government of Germany admitting to the wrong and changing its behavior towards Jews and others. In contrast, Israel does not recognize the occupation as being an act against humanity, which indicates that it does not consider its practices as responsible for the current oppressive way of life experienced by the Palestinian people.

Miller (1999) provided another dimension through which to interrogate unjust treatment of people using a socio-political lens aimed at a population's general well-being, pointing out that there needs to be a recognition of unfair treatment of populations. This is especially true for Palestinian people living in Gaza who have their electricity cut off without warning, or who are not able to get basic supplies into the territory. For Miller (1999), human dignity is linked with social equality on all levels of existence, including the most basic levels. Governing systems, such as the government of Israel, must recognize this link and demonstrate practices of social justice and equality. Young (2006) referred to such structural injustice, perpetrated through repressive policies, as a "backward looking condemnation" (p. 121).

Although the current goal for those opposing the Israeli government is to end the occupation, there remain greater challenges that will depend on fostering a humanitarian worldview and implementing practices of forgiveness through the adoption of ethics of forgiveness. Even if the occupation stopped tomorrow, there would still be a period of time needed to determine a variety of issues, including (a) the political structure (one state or two), (b) land disbursement, (c) the return of Palestinian refugees to their land, (d) negotiations between current Israeli settlements located on Palestinian land and the

Palestinian authorities, and (e) the restoration of agricultural farms, etc. I suggest that if these issues were to be negotiated without adopting behaviors that reflect moral relations and social justice consciousness, conflicts would likely again act as barriers to humanitarian solutions. Secondly, both Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine would need to take responsibility for their roles in the conflict. This responsibility includes agreements that the wrongdoing will not occur in the future. In Chapter I, I questioned whether or not an apology constitutes forgiveness, and I believe that question applies here. What has been accomplished when, as Avner asked, an apology would be given; however, the very next day a justification for another attack would emerge? In other words, I am asserting that if Israel continues its practices of oppression through the occupation, it is condemning not only Palestinians to living without dignity, but it is condemning its own people to living without moral considerations of others.

Insights into the realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be seen through the work of those engaged in non-violent, humanitarian acts and in the efforts of those promoting an end to the occupation. They hold a belief that through social connectedness, as Young (2006) wrote, masses will adopt a humanitarian worldview and demand a change in leadership; in turn, change will occur. I believe that some interviewees involved in these efforts perceive that the substance of forgiveness wields its own power and can change one's worldview from fear and mistrust to hope and faith in the possibility of building moral, trusting relationships. With regard to the occupation, for some Israelis, the idea of allowing Palestinians to rule their own lives and their own land may translate to too great a risk for fear of the destruction of Israel. Having this belief

reinforced by obdurate power structures makes it difficult for people to take the risk regardless of whether or not they see the occupation as oppressive. Justification for the oppression of the Palestinian people is based on the argument that Israel must protect itself from its enemies. The history of abuse against the Jewish people may support this stance. However, those interviewed for this study argued that oppression of others and military rule will not create the peace for which Israelis hope.

As I stated in the beginning of this section, I wanted to explore each participant's worldview given the lack of moral treatment under which so many Palestinian people are living. All held the belief that Israel's occupation and oppressive practices are morally wrong, and they held hope that these conditions can and will change through continued efforts to promote moral and just human interactions. A sense of hope for change is supported by the work on cognitive reappraisal that I have previously described and will address again below in discussions of historical trauma.

In closing this section, I conclude that there does not seem to be any question in terms of how the roles of power, politics, and responsibility impact the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, there was no dispute among interviewees that the policies of the Israeli government are responsible for the continued occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. They also shared an understanding of the power that is being wielded by the Israeli government over Israeli citizens, using fear to keep past experiences of trauma alive. Even with this abuse of power, all those interviewed felt confident that their work to promote humanitarian principles among perceived enemies will overcome the fears that the Israeli government instills. Their belief in humanism as a way to end the

occupation was clear. It manifested in their ability to separate the actions of the governments (both Hamas and Israel) from the sentiments of the Israeli and Palestinian people with whom moral relations based on social justice consciousness will prevail. Finally, the fear and mistrust that power structures use to manipulate people are dependent on the legacy of historical trauma, especially for Israelis and other Jewish populations around the world. In the next section, I will explore more deeply how historical trauma contributes to the challenges of practices of forgiveness.

### **The Legacy of Historical Trauma**

As I addressed historical trauma with interviewees, I defined the term according to the description given by McKnight (2004) whom I introduced in Chapter I. To provide a brief review of his theoretical stance, McKnight (2004) stressed that the effects of past trauma tend to overshadow the recognition of human rights, thereby inhibiting practices of trust among people. Fear resulting from historical trauma was influenced by both remembering and recounting such experiences, making historical trauma an important factor of consideration. It is especially reinforced in people when political leaders constantly remind the masses of their countries' histories (of oppression, victimization, etc.) and convince them that similar traumatic events could be easily repeated. Clearly, for this study, the phenomenon of historical trauma is especially relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

During his interview, Rabbi Michael spoke of the legacy of oppression that has been experienced by the Jewish people, asserting their need to grieve past experiences in order to understand what belongs to the past and what is present. He indicated that the

grieving process— following the horrors of the Holocaust—did not happen and, consequently, the past and the present have no separation. Although Rabbi Michael did not address why the grieving process has not occurred for Israelis following the Holocaust, considering the need for Jews to find a homeland and rebuild families, it would make sense that grieving the past was a luxury that could not be afforded. As such, I posit that if past experiences of historical trauma have not been effectively worked through, the ability to think reasonably and critically about both personal and communal safety, including the need for protection, has been lost. I see this lack of working through past experiences of victimization ripe for power structures to manipulate citizens' worldviews; in this case, the Israeli government, instilling fear of further victimization of the Jewish people by demonizing Palestinians and appealing to their (Jews) past experiences of trauma. Specifically, Rabbi Michael stressed the point that the experience of post-trauma (i.e., the Holocaust) has become current trauma; as such, views that the world is evil and unsafe are an accepted belief among many Jews. Considering this viewpoint in relation to the present-day Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many Israelis see themselves as victims and will perceive all current acts of aggression toward themselves or Israel as acts intended to repeat their victimization.

I again address the issue of working through past trauma by referring to the work of Halperin et al. (2013) on cognitive reappraisal, which was introduced in Chapter II. The theory behind cognitive reappraisal, as a mental strategy, focuses on changing the meaning of a situation in the individual's mind, thereby changing his/her response to it. Fitting to my work, Halperin et al. (2013) conducted a study in which they explored



Israeli participants' relationships to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The goal of their study was to determine if cognitive reappraisal efforts would increase subjects' conciliatory responses to the conflict and lessen aggressive responses. Although their findings were preliminary, researchers suggested that those Israeli's who went through reappraisal workshops held less anger and hostility towards Palestinians. Further, they were more likely to support conciliatory policies by the Israeli government towards Palestine. The most important finding, as evidenced through this particular study of Israeli subjects, is that human perspectives—including emotions of anger and aggression—can change, even for populations who have traumatic histories of embedded conflict, oppression, and violence. On this point, I suggest that Avner, a former Israeli soldier who invaded homes of Palestinians without cause, experienced a type of cognitive reappraisal when he reassessed the negative effects of aggression and oppression sanctioned by the Israeli government and decided to work for peace and reconciliation instead. In turn, I further suggest that Avner's and others' work with *Breaking the Silence*, which provides Israelis with real information regarding the effects of the government's aggression against their neighbors, is based on a reappraisal of assumptions and beliefs about the Palestinian people.

Additionally, Steve pointed out that it is not only the Israelis who have experienced oppression and trauma at the hands of others, but that Palestinians have also confronted similar experiences. He used the term “locked in” when speaking about the tendency of those individuals who have been traumatized to only see the evil in a group of people labeled as such, unable to recognize the reality that more/other people within

that given population are good. To this point, I posit that the occupation of Palestinian lands by Israel only reinforces the victimization of the Palestinian people while it supports the stereotypical labeling of Palestinians as enemies, a view embedded in the psyches of Israelis as a result of unresolved historical trauma and political manipulation. Therefore, I agree that by not having dealt with the past, many Israelis retain a narrow view of the world that perpetuates the notion of certain people being evil and, therefore, protection from these others must be provided. For Israelis, then, this protection is the occupation of Palestine that will keep the enemy in its place.

Within his narrative, Max addressed the issue of historical trauma and made a comment that I think holds true. He stated that neither side can give up the hope for a better past, which translates into holding onto the past until it can be rewritten, a hope that is not logically possible. Max's statement mirrors what Rabbi Michael stated about grieving and moving on; that is, holding onto past trauma reproduces one view of the world—that is dangerous and cannot be trusted. Rabbi Lerner (2012) addresses a common view of the world for both Palestinians and Israelis.

The eyes of both Israelis and Palestinians are so glazed over with the immediacy of painful historical memories that they have not been able to envision new possibilities in their relationship that might bring both communities the peace they actually desire. (p. 2)

Logically, while we know that the past cannot be rewritten, constant reminders of past victimization—especially instigated for manipulative purposes—instill and perpetuate fears that the victimization will recur. In turn, holding onto victimhood as part of one's fundamental identity also perpetuates the separation between ingrained perceptions of

good and evil. The victimized are always good, and the wrongdoer is always evil. Finally, based on Lerner's (2012) work and Max's confirming statement, I assert that when victims of historical trauma see the world in this way—dangerous and not trust worthy—gives license to those who are “good” to oppress or destroy those who they consider evil. Ultimately, I determined that there was a general consensus among study participants about the need to be more focused on the future and less on the past histories of both Israelis and Palestinians; in particular, to think about what both sides want for future generations.

Based on participants' viewpoints about the nature and psychic consequences of historical trauma, I understand that it is an important phenomenon that must be acknowledged within the dynamics of the conflict. However, I maintain that historical trauma cannot be excused as a justification for current oppressive practices imposed upon Palestinians by Israel. Furthermore, I do not believe that historical trauma only affects those who actually experienced the trauma firsthand.

Based on such responses, I believe it is important to explore why the U.S. government financially contributes to Israeli military operations in the occupation; further, why the U.S. and other countries turn their backs on Israel's abuses and breaking of international law. Specifically, how has historical trauma, relative to the Holocaust which was not directly experienced by Americans, impacted U.S. involvement in the conflict? I suggest that it plays an ancillary role in contributing to U.S. support of the occupation because of the historical fact of America's late involvement in speaking against the persecution of European Jews and its later commitment to the Allied war effort. In other

words, the U.S. did not intervene in Nazi Germany's atrocities targeting Jews (as well as other marginalized groups) until the country was directly attacked in World War II. As well, following the war, ". . . the Allies also did little to save Jews. The gates of the United States were closed—Jewish refugees were turned away from our shores . . .” (Lerner, 2012, p. 102). Possibly feelings of guilt resulted from this treatment of Jews by the United States and other Allies and may justify the large sums that are provided to the Israeli government each year. I maintain that the question all nations need to address is whether or not they can support Israel as an independent nation while, at the same time, condemn its oppressive practices against Palestine. Finally, I conclude that if the United States continues to see Israel as a country of victims, and itself as guilty for not having intervened in Jewish persecution during Hitler's reign, this perspective could continue to serve as justification for America's continued support of the occupation.

Rami also expressed concern over Israelis seeing themselves as having a “right” to victimhood, pointing to this perspective as the crux of the problem. This view of a right to victimhood lends itself to avoid seeing the other as a human being with similar feelings and frailties. He also accused the Israeli government of using this view of victimhood to maintain their power over Israelis, posing an assertive or aggressive stance as the only viable choice for protection of Israeli citizens and the country itself. Gideon agreed that historical trauma plays a part in the current conflict. However, he pointed out that other countries with histories of being enemies are now having positive relationships. Maha also addressed this issue stating that Israel has now forgiven Germany for its part in the Holocaust and wonder why Israel cannot forgive Palestinians for any wrongdoing.

For me, the primary question about historical trauma has to do with its relation to future structures and acts of oppression. Should historical trauma give license to oppress others? This echoes the question that Avner asked when he referenced groups of marginalized people forming to advocate for their human rights while also implementing exclusionary practices toward others who are different from them. In effect, this scenario would seem to perpetuate a cycle of intolerance and, in some cases, oppression. Overall, study participants did not deny or negate the realities of past traumas experienced by the people of both Israel and Palestine, but did reject the notion that historical trauma justifies inhumane treatment of others in the present or in the future.

Sam touched on the subject of historical trauma by expressing his shock that little violence is exercised by the Palestinian people given their unjust treatment, including being taken from their homes and forced to live in refugee camps. Certainly, the trauma that the Palestinian people have experienced—both in the past and currently—could be used to justify violence. Nonetheless, Sam noted that, collectively, Palestinian people have chosen a different path, calling this seemingly intentional choice to forego revenge as a true act of forgiveness while not giving up their rights as a people. In Sam's estimation, then, the trauma that Palestinians have continued to experience since the advent of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not resulted in advocating or committing inhumane actions against others. However, Sam's attitude does not reflect the view of others who readily cite incidents of violence by Palestinians against Israel. On this point, I suggest that opening up such a discussion could lead to nothing more than a verbal contest in which parties declare who did what to whom, which side is more violent, and

which incident caused more deaths. Nothing will be gained from such a debate and, instead, as Sa'ed pointed out, forgiveness is needed now—more than ever—if there is to be any hope to create change through meaningful dialogue that might lead to productive action.

In Chapter IV, I addressed the influence of religious beliefs and practices in my discussion of the findings on historical trauma because religion is deeply and historically rooted in present-day living and the socio-cultural worldviews held on both sides of the conflict. As pointed out, the three faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam come together on practices of forgiveness. Teachings of forgiveness are prominent in each religion, although practices differ. Specific to the Jewish faith, Lerner (2003) emphasized the teachings about love and compassion in the *Torah* for Jews to renew their understandings of the *Torah* and G-d's word. These teachings are a powerful tool and remind the Jewish people, including myself, of the significance of our religious roots and the responsibility we have towards one another.

Maha, as a Palestinian Muslim, and Yitzhak, as an Israeli Jew, both expressed how religion is used by the media to create fear and use it against peace efforts. The media makes a clear connection between one's culture and one's religion. Although in the secular world, there is a tendency to connect culture with religion as if both are one, the interviewees expressed their joint opinion that there is a clear separation in their part of the world. Furthermore, most of the interviewees were able to explain how their religious roots influenced their view of humanity regardless of whether or not they were still actively practicing. Each one spoke of the traditional religious teachings of their

respective faiths as being rooted in humanistic worldviews, putting forgiveness at the center of these teachings. Despite the general understanding among the interviewees of these deep religious roots and their connections to humanism, there seemed to be a disconnect between believing in religious edicts and regularly practicing them. Several pointed this contrast out by stating that religious beliefs need to be validated by practice and when they are not, there is a broken connection to a sustained humanistic worldview.

I tried to gain some reasonable understanding between historical religious roots and historical trauma. In general, the interviewees related strong connections between their religious roots and their belief in humanity, which most likely contributes to their work for peace. My interpretation is that historical trauma seems to be able to trump religious roots, especially as it relates to the conflict. In other words, both Judaism and Christianity consider forgiveness as tied to beliefs and connection with G-d, yet forgiveness is not being practiced by those who profess to hold religious values. Certainly, it was clear to me that strong religious beliefs are embedded in both Israeli and Palestinian societies based on histories rife with principles of humanity and forgiveness. Likewise, the United States professes to be a country of Christian faith and practices, and I raise this point because the U.S. clearly holds influence in the Middle East. However, those fueling the conflict seem to turn their backs on the significance that their religious faiths collectively hold in terms of applying their fundamental tenets to humanitarian practices. Steve may have come closest to addressing this disconnect by stating that each side thinks it is on the side of goodness and, therefore, doing G-d's work. I conclude that when one side believes itself to be on the side of goodness or on the side of G-d, power

becomes a driving force and the tenets of each religion become lost. I refer here back to Newman's (2013) writings (Chapter II) on the "moral gap" that defines the responsibility to ask for forgiveness and to grant forgiveness. This responsibility of forgiveness can be directly traced to Jewish religious law that, I assert, is being ignored in this conflict; further, I suggest that the hold of historical trauma is part of this moral gap. To get a clearer understanding why this dilemma or moral gap exists, it would be necessary to interview Israelis who support the occupation and Palestinians who believe that only taking back power through military means will end the conflict. Given the work of the interviewees and their common belief that the occupation needs to end, these interviewees produced only one side of a proposed solution—the end of the occupation—which leaves many unanswered questions that contribute to the total picture.

Lauritzen (1987) provided a Christian view of forgiveness—linked to one's belief about G-d, stating that depending on the strength of this belief, the quality of forgiveness takes on a different meaning. One interpretation from this statement may be that it is godly to turn over to G-d all responsibility for forgiveness thereby taking it out of the human decision. Several participants indicated a strong relationship with their faiths, while others talked about not participating in any formal religion; however, many of those made distinctions in their practice of a formal religion versus an understandings of G-d. Maha was able to make the separation by stating that everyone is under one G-d, meaning that we are all human and should forget prescriptive religious practices and politics that divide us. Similarly, Sam separated religion and spirituality, describing himself as being secular in his beliefs and viewing forgiveness as having no dependency



on religious belief. As cited here, the various comments about religion support my interpretation of Lauritzen's (1987) view that forgiveness takes on a different meaning depending on one's belief, even if that belief is stated as moving away from traditional religious contexts to a belief in secular humanism. This view seems to be similar to Avner's view of religion and practices.

In conclusion of this section, I determined that historical trauma was identified by interviewees as playing a major role in continuing the conflict. However, there were differences of opinion with regard to defining what that role is or has been. In its wake, historical trauma has fueled fear and mistrust in Israelis, with many perceiving these feelings to be manipulated by the Israeli government in order to continue the occupation of Palestinian territory and keep the current government in power. Interestingly, most participants agreed that historical trauma can be overcome; that through a worldview of humanitarian principles, people can learn to live with each other as loving neighbors. I have come to the conclusion that a secondary goal for those promoting peace through humanitarian efforts is for both sides to move beyond their historical trauma and look to the future of what can be instead of what is. The message is that the past cannot be changed, but can be grieved. Therefore, dragging it along every day becomes a heavy weight that will not allow loving relationships. This is the essential message that interviewees offered in response to the topic of historical trauma and its relationship to the conflict. I now move to the next section, focusing on social justice, equality, and connections to forgiveness.

### **Justice, Equality, and Forgiveness**

All participants stated that the occupation of Palestinian territories by the dominant Israeli government was the primary causal factor of injustice and inequities as experienced by the Palestinian people. The unjust political policies imposed by Israel mirror the concept of social injustice as put forth by Miller (1999) in Chapter II. He argued that the enactment of unjust policies is cause for the targeted population to have fewer advantages than other members of society. Further, Miller (1999) emphasized the importance of dignified and respectful treatment of people as essential to one's freedom and sense of equality. On this point, participants spoke consistently of the lack of dignity and respect shown to Palestinian people on several fronts: (a) land continually taken from them, (b) their freedom curtailed through limited access to travel and, most importantly, (c) the imposition of limits that impede their access to everyday necessities such as water, electricity, and food. Of particular importance is the fact that justice and equality were defined by interviewees less as forms of actions and more as a way of life; that is, existence seen as encompassing a fundamental consideration of others as humans deserving of respect.

Gideon made the distinction between peace and justice, which I found to be an important distinction. He was clear that he does not work for peace, but for justice, stating that people need to see others as their equal. He stipulated that efforts for peace will be unsuccessful unless there is justice for all parties involved. I do think that peace and justice may be used interchangeably, but further consideration brings an understanding that peace may mean the absence of violence and conflict, whereas justice

refers to equal treatment of others, similar to the views of Miller (1999). For purposes of this study, it is important to make this distinction between peace and justice when there are international proposals of peace talks and peace treaties occurring between countries and sovereign lands. It should not be assumed that peace necessarily translates into justice. However, justice needs to have a place in any negotiations purposed toward peacemaking between Israel and Palestine.

In concert with Gideon's thinking on the connection between justice and peace, other participants voiced the same views, stating that justice must include equality—meaning that all people need to be treated with dignity and respect. All participants indicated that there must be an understanding of the essence of humanism as a concept and as a practice. In this regard, they used the term “seeing” others as equal. Thus, I posit that when Palestinian and Israeli people cannot see and experience each other (i.e., the wall between Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine and other erected, physical obstacles), this imposed separation inhibits each side's ability to see the others like themselves; that is, as human beings. Again, this is the theme presented by Eisikovits (2004), that keeping Israelis and Palestinians separated by walls and military-guarded borders only strengthens one group's inability to see the others as humans, and therefore, contributes to a desensitized climate of comfort with inequality. In response, Max stated the importance of actually experiencing oppression—for those who have not—as a way to understand its dehumanizing consequences. He also spoke of the power of denial concerning the devastating realities of the occupation. Similarly, Daniel reiterated that Americans are in denial about how the United States contributes to the Israeli military

buildup and, consequently, to the occupation itself. Bringing Young's (2006) discussion of structural injustice and moral wrongs to this issue, I interpret his theories to reinforce these study participants' critiques of the wrongdoing associated with the continuing occupation of Palestine. Young (2006) further impressed the view, as did the participants, that as moral human beings, we have an obligation to minimize the suffering of others. Additionally, as participants indicated, we have an obligation to ensure justice and equality for everyone.

While participants collectively affirmed the need to promote practices of social justice based on equality and cooperative human relations, their communications on these points were not always without conflict. Avner raised an important issue (also addressed in the context of historical trauma in the previous section) in which he felt conflicted regarding his belief in equality and social justice. Specifically, he stated that in their attempts to gain equality, groups of likeness often exclude others, forming especially among those populations that have been oppressed. On the one hand, it is understandable that those who have been excluded from equal treatment would want to come together in order to change the system and gain equal treatment and access to needed, everyday resources. For Avner, the ideological conflict comes with the notion of exclusivity that does not allow "others" to join the new group. From Avner's thinking, I continue to wrestle with the following question: In our attempt to fight for equality, are we becoming like those whom we oppose? Most importantly, is it necessary to practice exclusivity in attempts to gain inclusivity? I propose that this question needs to be addressed, not only in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but in all struggles for equality. Can

exclusion and the imposition of inequities ever be acceptable as practices purposed toward social justice and, if so, who would be positioned to determine which populations should be excluded? Is it a breach in social justice consciousness to exclude dominant or privileged populations? As researcher, it became evident to me that scenarios such as those Avner described create dilemmas in defining clear-cut definitions of social justice and providing solutions to create a just society. Similarly, Sa'ed struggled with conditional practices of social justice that he had experienced. He raised concerns that address typically universal forms of oppression. For example, he explained that we cannot fight for women's rights, yet be racist in our daily living practices; or, we cannot claim to support racial equality and denounce rights for the LGBTQ community at the same time. Clearly, concepts and practices of justice and equality go beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, spanning a continuum of worldviews on what constitutes genuine humanism.

For me, as both researcher and scholar activist, such comments raised the need to look further into ideas of human rights and to search for challenges to our basic assumptions of what human rights and social justice mean. With this concern in mind, I reiterate the point made by Douzinas (2013), initially addressed in Chapter II, referring to his writings in which he challenges us to rethink the world's understanding of human rights and equality. He pointed out that although, historically, there have been counteractions to human rights violations—including the Holocaust—no common meaning or understanding of human rights has been established from which to validate our shared human condition. The lack of a global approach to developing such a common

understanding can be seen by the many conflicts that continue to occur across religious differences, ethnicities, and socio-cultural beliefs. For this study, the implications of Douzinas's (2013) work are grounded in the continuation of human rights violations following the experience of the Holocaust and other genocides perpetrated around the world, such as in Rwanda, and most currently, Syria.

Continuing with Douzinas (2013), he explained that morality has historically been defined by the dominant social order. On this premise, therefore, I am suggesting that our conceptions of morality have been created by social justice/human rights movements typically led and defined by hegemonic systems. Likewise, I have used the word "humanity" throughout this study with the assumption that everyone understands and agrees to its definition and practices. However, I admit that, as a white Westerner, I have my own vision of humanity and how it should be defined, also acknowledging that my definition may not be that of others. Admittedly, prior to this study, I have assumed that my definitions of justice and equality are universal. Now, I better understand how that assumption alone is laden with hegemonic principles of how people should live. Similarly, study participants' responses collectively revealed a corresponding problem with understanding the concept of forgiveness as a commonly defined phenomenon; rather, understanding forgiveness as being defined through a frame of reference of the one who has been wronged, thereby further contributing to the nebulousness of the act of forgiving. There is no guarantee that forgiveness, alone, will lead to a promise of justice and equality. Nor will the ending of the Israeli occupation, by itself, necessarily lead to practices of justice and equality for Palestinians. However, if people are able to view each

other through a humanistic lens and practice ethics of forgiveness, these challenges that past experiences raise, may provide a clarity to forgiveness and its value toward justice and equality.

Yitzhak also questioned general understandings of justice, seeing it as a type of revenge. In fact, he saw justice as working against peace in that what may be deemed justice for Israelis may not be justice for Palestinians and vice versa, suggesting that justice may be subject to both personal and political interpretations. From my perspective, Yitzhak's view of justice emerged as an issue of interpretation, touching back on Douzinas's (2013) work illuminating the need for establishing common understandings of essential human concepts. Therefore, while justice is positioned at the forefront of the movement to end the occupation, to Yitzhak it yet means revenge. Conversely, Bassam pushed for justice by insisting his daughter's murderer be tried in court and saw justice as the opposite of revenge. I propose that these differences in perspectives and understandings can and should be addressed in further research on the meanings and practices of social justice and equality, specifically as applied to humanism as a philosophical worldview purposed toward the improvement of the human condition.

Even with these stated weaknesses in definitions of justice, equality, and forgiveness, all participants agreed that there are basic moral behaviors that need to be recognized and practiced. To further this view, I turn again to Urban-Walker (2006) who wrote on this very topic of moral behavior as it can lead to healing relationships. She stressed that, as social beings, we are vulnerable to wrongdoings that require what she termed "moral repair." She inferred that moral repair requires a commitment to practices

of social justice and equality regardless of past wrongdoings, along with a trust that when wrongdoings do occur, they will be repaired. Most interviewees agreed with this premise and added that forgiveness and more importantly, ethics of forgiveness, need to be practiced in order for justice and equality to become embedded in communities. It follows now that I focus on the term “social beings,” which indicates to me that people need to be in communal settings in order to interact and engage with each other. In other words, I am saying that people are by nature social creatures. Therefore, awareness of their common human bonds and their exercise of social skills must be prioritized in everyday life if people are to understand forgiveness as a chosen behavior grounded in good intent and practice. In essence, I make my argument that forgiveness is a necessary element of human development that contributes to practices of social justice consciousness as we interact with others.

As I constructed the analysis for this section, it occurred to me how much both Palestinians and Israelis live in isolation from one another, reinforced by lack of engagement and uniquely different living experiences. Palestinians are increasingly living in physical isolation as their land is being taken away, and they are pushed into refugee camps. As well, Israelis are also living in isolation, a personal isolation full of fear and mistrust that contributes to an inability to freely see others as human beings connected to themselves. Any movement towards changing the worldview of either side seems far reaching. On this point, not one interviewee indicated that resolution or a change in worldview by either side was imminent. Some of the participants were divided on what should come first: the occupation followed by forgiveness or forgiveness extended as a



driving force in ending the occupation, similar to the chicken and egg debate.

Nonetheless, interviewees' commitment to social justice and equality, along with their belief that forgiveness must play a key role in reaching both, stood at the center of their work regardless of differences in process.

As such, Rabbi Michael spoke of forgiveness as recognizing the equality of all humanity, meaning that as humans we are all interconnected and experience the same feelings, have the same desires, and want the same things for ourselves and our children. As communicated across these interviews, there is a message about the world being seen through a humanitarian lens. A worldview that includes humanitarian principles has greater chance to be applied in relations with others, even where resolution of conflict remains a challenge. The important finding here is that practices of social justice and equality must go beyond a specific issue or conflict. They must be embraced as a way of living. Given this view, it is logical to prescribe that the practice of equality and justice requires a worldview change and not just a change specific to this conflict. To apply this universal view to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one will need to recognize and hold him/herself accountable for what Arendt (1958) referred to as "everyday trespasses" (p. 240) that occur among people. Each side needs to acknowledge both the victimization of the other, as well as the perpetration of violence inflicted by either side, and then practice forgiveness in order to break the barriers of isolation under which both populations live.

Lastly, the area of concern in which all participants agreed is that vengeance must not be part of the solution. They expressed seeing forgiveness as the opposite of vengeance. Based on their collective concept of humanity, justice, and equality, they

spoke against retaliation while they confirmed the need to end the occupation of Palestinian territories and Israeli military interventions. As Maha said, “An eye for an eye makes the world blind.”

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I analyzed participants’ views on forgiveness, focusing on five themes: (a) forgiveness as a humanistic behavior; (b) power, politics, and responsibility; (c) the legacy of historical trauma; (d) justice, equality, and forgiveness; and, (e) pedagogy of forgiveness (to be discussed in Chapter VI). There was virtually no disagreement among interviewees that the occupation of Palestinian territories by the Israeli government must end before any justice or equality can be realized, and that the responsibility for ending the occupation lay squarely on the shoulders of the Israeli government. However, the role of forgiveness in this process revealed different viewpoints. Where participants connected on forgiveness was through understanding ethics of forgiveness as behaviors that were necessary ingredients in the building of moral relations. Even those who were not clear on what I meant when I asked them to define forgiveness agreed that revenge or retaliation should be avoided as a response to conflict. Study participants did not address forgiveness as forgoing anger and resentment as some theorists claim as necessary to choosing forgiveness. Although anger and resentment were not specifically named by participants in relation to forgiveness, many expressed their anger and frustration at the inhumane treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli government, which drove much of their work to end the occupation. I interpreted their feelings as being more connected to grief (as opposed to anger and resentment),

especially as they talked about the lack of humanity demonstrated and the acts of injustice occurring on a daily basis. Although the concept of forgiveness had various meanings for the participants, they viewed ethics of forgiveness as essential to how people should be treating each other.

Participants regarded influences such as religion and historical trauma as causal factors for the conflict. However, such influences did not trump their belief in basic humanitarian qualities and moral relations as being essential factors in moving forward toward conflict resolution. As religious roots were traced, they showed that treating others with basic dignity and respect is at the core of religious teachings in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as is forgiveness. However, according to the participants, where religion seems to contribute to the conflict is not so much in the tenets, but in the labels that have been stamped on particular religious or cultural groups. In other words, human spirituality held more importance for interviewees than did actual formalized religious practices or attachments to labels.

The Holocaust, as a symbol of historical trauma, was raised most often when participants addressed this issue in relation to the conflict. It was an important causal factor that some viewed as needing to be overcome through grieving, while others accused Israelis of finding some comfort in accepting and perpetuating the victim role. Not one participant determined that historical trauma should excuse current Israeli government policies. Forgiveness was a prevalent focus in this regard. Questions were posed asking why Israel could not forgive Palestinians, but could forgive Germany for their role in the Holocaust. Forgiveness also could play a role in moving beyond trauma

to moral repair of relationships, but it would require the two populations interacting with each other as neighbors. Given current Israeli policies that separate Israelis and Palestinians, conditions for interacting are rare, if allowed at all. Under these circumstances, theories of treatment of the other are/have been difficult to put into practice because the other has been kept hidden.

All participants, as previously stated, were involved in efforts to end the occupation through non-violent and humanitarian efforts, providing a cohesive platform with a common goal. Their work to end the occupation has been based on those human capacities that ethics of forgiveness define, even though participants communicated various views regarding whether or not forgiveness plays a key role. To continue this work on forgiveness within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically, I would design a follow-up study that would purposefully include subjects who support the occupation, seeking their views on forgiveness and any other additional contributions to this area of research.

In my next chapter, I address pedagogy of forgiveness, the fifth identified theme, exploring how forgiveness can be taught. Keeping with the focus of this study, I include implications for creating moral relations and social justice consciousness in the educational setting.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **PEDAGOGY OF FORGIVENESS**

#### **Introduction**

I have dedicated a chapter to pedagogy of forgiveness because of the great importance the role of education plays in creating learning environments that teach and model moral humanistic relations that are necessary to promote an ethic of social justice. As a reminder to the reader, I interviewed 12 participants made up of four Israelis, four Palestinians, and four Americans, all who were actively involved in ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. All 12 interviewees addressed forgiveness and education, most in positive views. Only one, Gideon, felt that forgiveness cannot be taught until the occupation ends. This view may have more to do with his concept of forgiveness, which he also views as not possible until the occupation ends. However, other interviewees felt strongly that forgiveness can be taught and gave differing views on learning. Max (American) and Avner (Israeli) spoke of how exposure of oppressive and violent practices brought an awareness to the consciousness of others; Daniel (American) and Sa'ed (Palestinian), both professors, stressed the importance of exploration of students' belief systems and exposure to other cultures; Rabbi Michael (American) thinks it is important for people to become involved in community activities that work against oppressive practices; Steve (American) spoke of the importance of role models in opening up one's world to differences in people; Maha (Palestinian) and

Bassam (Palestinian) saw the importance of education in teaching forgiveness as hate and oppression are learned behaviors and forgiveness can also be a learned behavior. The theme that ties all of their views together is one of human engagement that encourages seeing others through human lenses that connect all of us to each other. It is this theme on which I base my argument for the establishment of educational environments that embrace cultures of moral relations and social justice consciousness through the practice of ethics of forgiveness.

Through my research, which combines theoretical explorations and testimonials, I have come to the conclusion that if we are to live in a world that practices respect, empathy, benevolence, trust, and other ethics of forgiveness, these ethics need to be taught, embraced, and lived. As such, the American educational system is a logical setting for this task as, I will argue, a pedagogy of forgiveness can be implemented and sustained in today's educational settings if we are intentional about recognizing the intrinsically human and communal nature of education; that is, education understood as a process nourished by individual freedom, dialogical relationships, community, building and commitment to democratic values for living, learning, and working. All of these values contribute to one's worldview, which influences our behaviors towards others.

Secondly, from a developmental perspective, the educational setting is an ideal setting to influence behavior and social/emotional growth through social justice contexts. Practices of empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, trust, and other ethics of forgiveness are important elements within an educational setting in order to instill moral relations and social justice consciousness within the school setting and beyond. Therefore, I conclude

that a pedagogy of forgiveness breaks new ground as a philosophical educational construct and a practice.

Understanding how the concepts forgiveness and practices of ethics of forgiveness work—in tandem—is essential to the implementation of a pedagogy of forgiveness that can be embedded into curriculums and educational environments. Therefore, in this chapter I intend to more concretely promote an understanding of how a pedagogy of forgiveness can add a dimension of humanistic approaches to teaching and learning that leads to development of social justice consciousness, effectively engaging students as worthy human beings and not just consumers and producers of facts.

### **Integrating a Pedagogy of Forgiveness into the American Educational System**

There is no doubt that people practice what they learn as can be seen through the responses of interviewees who shared their worldviews. All interviewees shared their history of the many things that influenced their worldviews that included religious, social, and political environments. These worldviews contribute to the way in which we try to find ways to live with each other. All interviewees talked about the Israeli government as practicing a political climate of domination and elimination in order to maintain the status quo instead of embracing differences and living peacefully with each other. Paradoxically, the pull of humanistic instincts that cause the conflicts and struggles that, from a positive point of view, also provide opportunities to embrace an ethic of social justice. This ethic promotes the natural humanistic qualities that include behaviors such as inclusiveness, safety, equity, acceptance, and forgiveness. What I mean by this is that those humanistic

instincts (fear, anger, hurt) that contribute to conflicts and struggles are emotions that can be changed through education and face-to-face engagement.

Education, therefore, is a key element that invites opportunities to replace the negative behaviors towards each other with humanistic and moral relations. Because I believe that these changes include active interaction among people, I argue that a pedagogy of forgiveness is less about a curriculum and more about creating a community that practices ethics of forgiveness such as empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, and trust among others. It is important to understand that creating a community is an action rather than a standard curriculum; that is, it is more about *how* students and adults relate to each other than *what* is being taught. I see the integration of a pedagogy of forgiveness as a way of teaching and integrating identified principles of forgiveness that are necessary not only to repair relationships following offenses, but are necessary to everyday human interactions regardless of whether or not an offense has occurred.

I will focus on principles of forgiveness as opposed to the act itself, defining principles as those conditions that are necessary for forgiveness to occur. I make the distinction between principles of forgiveness and the act of forgiveness for this reason: the act of forgiveness occurs following an offense while principles of forgiveness are not conditional on an offense having taken place. Rather, principles of forgiveness are essential to morally sound interactions among humans regardless of whether or not an offense has occurred. Based on this view, I conclude that principles of forgiveness should be practiced as elements of developing moral and ethical attitudes and skills, not simply as a set of apologetic strategies to be used after an offense has occurred. As such, because



a pedagogy of forgiveness is a new or alternative concept in relation to contemporary educational practice, I will address the research based on the following conceptual contexts: conceptions of forgiveness, conceptions of human development and conceptions of the purpose of education, all necessary elements to a pedagogy of forgiveness as I conceive it. Putting it all together, I will explain what a pedagogy of forgiveness offers to teaching and learning, highlight school-based activities that promote ethics of forgiveness, and how it might be formed and implemented in 21st century education.

To begin, I make a case for the importance of a pedagogy of forgiveness to building a culture of caring and respect that promotes social justice consciousness.

### **Why a Pedagogy of Forgiveness?**

In a recent national survey of youth conducted by the organization, *Making Caring Common Project*, a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, youth were asked to prioritize achievement, happiness, and caring. Results showed “about 80% of youth picked high achievement or happiness as their top choice, as roughly 20% selected caring for others” (Weissbourd et al., 2014). Respondents also reported that their parents and teachers hold the same priorities. Conversely, a national survey of teachers and parents conducted by *Sesame Workshop*, an educational nonprofit behind the children’s show, *Sesame Street*, found that 78% of teachers indicate it is more important for their students to be kind to others over academic success while 26% chose academic success over kindness. Parents followed the trend with 73% indicating kindness was more important than academic success, of which importance showed 26% (*Sesame*

*Workshop*, 2016, Results). These two reports are showing a disconnect between what teachers and parents report as priorities with regard to kindness to others (empathy, sympathy, love, benevolence, etc.) and what students choose as their priorities and perceive as teachers' and parents' priorities. This disconnect indicates to me that adults are not adequately impressing the importance of kindness, or ethics of forgiveness, on young people and secondly, students are getting a message from both parents and the school system that academic success takes priority over humanistic treatment of others. These results contribute to my argument for a pedagogy of forgiveness that promotes social justice consciousness and moral relations. The disconnect, as shown through these surveys, provides opportunities for the educational system to set priorities of practicing kindness and other ethics of forgiveness in the lives of young people through a pedagogy of forgiveness being taught and modeled. Being kind to others is a natural phenomenon of humanity and, therefore, should be embraced and sculpted throughout the environment where young people are constantly interacting with others and humanistically developing.

The late David Purpel (1989) made this point as he wrote of the deep human capacity we have as human beings to be concerned with social equality and the care of others. He wrote, "We are a caring people, a contention which can be seen in the intense concern parents have for their children . . ." (p. 40), a deep caring that our educational systems have traditionally embraced and promoted. He added, "However, the stress on competition and individuality narrows and undermines this impulse to care and nourish" (Purpel, 1989, p. 40). Educational practices of a pedagogy of forgiveness has the ability to restore the deep caring that continues to be embedded in our culture of which Purpel

wrote. We have not lost our deep human capacity for caring and compassion, but we have lost sight of how to embrace these and other ethics of forgiveness as seen by the many conflicts in the world. It is my contention that a pedagogy of forgiveness offers pathways for our educational systems to return to a culture of caring.

To reinforce a tradition of caring and concern for others, intentional practices of ethics of forgiveness must be embedded into our school systems. I begin with the ethic of empathy by citing Weissbourd et al. (2014) who stated in their work on empathy and education, “Empathy is a key to preventing cruelty, to strong relationships of many kinds, to success in numerous professions, and to citizenship” (p. 42). They point out that just by understanding the feelings and plight of others does not necessarily mean that they value these perspectives of others. I argue that a pedagogy of forgiveness will not only promote an understanding of others’ feelings and their circumstances, but will be able to instill value in these perspectives that is necessary for practice. I further argue that within the educational setting, teaching empathy and the value of caring for others is possible and key elements to create social justice consciousness. Additionally, I argue that a culture that embraces ethics of forgiveness encompasses those human capacities that define the way in which we behave towards others regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing occurs. In such a culture when wrongdoing does occur, there is a greater chance of moral repair when behaviors are based on humanistic relations.

To further my argument for the need for a pedagogy of forgiveness, I refer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the total disregard for humanity as a result of the conflict. If those interviewed, especially the Israelis and Palestinians who are living in the midst of

violence every day of their lives, see the value of teaching forgiveness, it is obviously considered a process for bringing peace to longstanding violent practices and moral relations to populations who are currently mired in hate and mistrust. Certainly, there are countless other examples around the world that mirror the inhumane treatment of others and my study has brought an awareness of the capacity that humans have to totally disregard elements of humanity. In this conflict and others like it, ethics of forgiveness are being completely disregarded and replaced by vengeance and violence against those who are perceived enemies instead of humans with likenesses to be valued. The view by interviewees in this study that forgiveness can be taught and must be taught in order to end the violence and oppression supports my contention that a pedagogy of forgiveness needs to be a foundational educational element. A culture that practices ethics of forgiveness will embed a deep appreciation for the value of humanity, which will be evident in relations with others regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. An educational system that adopts such a culture will also be embracing a humanity that turns away from violence and destruction and solves its relationship issues through compassionate and caring dialogue. Not only will the educational system be influencing young minds, spirits, and souls through their years in school, but ethics of forgiveness will become a way of life well beyond their schooling years.

I submit an additional reason why a pedagogy of forgiveness is important. In Chapter I, I pointed out the challenge of defining forgiveness in order for it to be well understood in our relations. I referred to forgiveness as an abstract concept thereby making it difficult to both define and sometimes conceptualize. Similarly, all 12

interviewees responded to forgiveness with various definitions or by asking me for clarification of what I meant by it before they responded. These responses reflect the abstract concept of forgiveness that I mentioned above. A pedagogy of forgiveness lends itself to a practice and promotion of ethics of forgiveness instead of insisting on a definition, meaning that the practice is what is important in creating moral relations and social justice consciousness. A pedagogy of forgiveness lessens the challenge of trying to define forgiveness yet strengthens its true meaning in our conception of humanity and well-being.

Lastly, I propose that it is an opportune time for practices of a pedagogy of forgiveness to be embedded in the American educational system based on theories of human development. Furthering the relationship between human development and learning I turn to the work of Anna Stetsenko, and Igor Arievitch (2002), both professors at City University of New York, who wrote on human development processes and learning readiness in educational settings. Their work in human development and learning in a sociocultural framework theory that addresses the development of children's minds impress, ". . . why and how developmental processes are fundamentally dependent upon educated practices and associated learning" (p. 85).

This theory posits that children's minds develop as a result of constant interactions with the social world—the world of people who do things with and for each other, who learn from each other, and use the experiences of previous generations to successfully meet the demands of life in the present. (p. 87)

Their definition of a social world also references a setting based on ethics of forgiveness where moral relations are at the foundation of constant interactions among others. It is

here that developmental processes may be influenced within an educational setting based on a pedagogy of forgiveness. Taking from the work of Stetsenko and Arievitch (2002) in human development and learning, I argue that if we are able to understand the necessary relationship between human development and human learning processes, traditional teaching practices that are driven solely by cognitive-based standardized curriculum can be replaced with critical pedagogical concepts that embrace human development and learning as naturally integrated processes that are fundamental to one another.

To summarize this section, I have presented arguments that support a pedagogy of forgiveness as important to creating social justice consciousness within the school setting and beyond. A pedagogy of forgiveness will remove the gap between what students think their teachers and parents view as a priority in education and show through practice—a commitment of kindness and caring of others as a priority in their lives. At a crucial time in the lives of young people as they are continually developing physically and socially, a pedagogy of forgiveness will promote students' understanding of empathy and kindness to others. At this time, they will learn that being kind to others is a priority for both their parents and teachers, and these ethics will have a greater chance of being a natural practice among people, as Purpel (1989) wrote. Practices of empathy and other related practices of sympathy, benevolence, love, and trust will replace the cruelty and oppression that is acted upon against others. Lastly, through a culture of humanity and moral relations, there will be less need to find a rote definition of forgiveness, and instead, place importance on a greater understanding of forgiveness being essential to the human experience.

In the next section, I will present various theoretical concepts that I view as supporting a pedagogy of forgiveness followed by classroom activities that imbue ethics of forgiveness and contribute to social justice consciousness.

### **Theoretical Concepts that Inform a Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

I have a vision of a classroom where students are excited about learning demonstrated by dialogic engagement—posing questions to the teacher and each other—all talking at once, encouraging differences in opinions. In this vision, all students see themselves as learners and contributors to the classroom and the world, and see likenesses in others instead of differences. I envision a school system where throughout the day all students and all adults talk to each other and intently listen and respond with words that reflect recognition of value of the other. I envision an environment where adults are hungry to learn from students and they are not afraid to admit to their desire to learn from students. I believe that my vision is shared with many and desired by students, teachers, and administrators of school systems. I base my vision on the belief that we are all equally responsible for creating a school system and a world that embraces foundations of liberated learning, humanism, moral interactions, and social justice consciousness. Creating such a learning environment that mirrors my vision and similar visions is possible and begins with theoretical concepts, or blueprints, that inform reflective practices. I will present theories that inform a liberated learning environment followed by practices that are based on these theoretical concepts.

**Freedom.** In support of my argument that a pedagogy of forgiveness is necessary to socially just educational practices, I begin with the work of Paulo Freire (1970) who

writes about freedom from oppression in both educational and political contexts.

“Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). What I interpret his meaning of freedom to be in relation to education, is the freedom of the student to be able to think, question, and express ideas and feelings that learning arouses. For the teacher, I believe freedom means prompting students to express ideas and feelings in response to the subject at hand and also finding her own learning through her work with students. This type of freedom may seem to be an obvious element in teaching and learning; however, Freire points out the reality of current educational oppressive pedagogical practices stemming from “a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know” (Freire, 1970, p. 60). In effect, the standardized educational model borrows from Freire’s (1970) “banking concept of education” (p. 73) that positions students as objects in which teachers are required to deposit information, thus ensuring that a controlled conception of liberation is externally defined and internally accepted by the objectified student. Thus, the students become the oppressed and the teacher becomes the oppressor, placing freedom as a form of rescue from these oppressive roles and practices.

To extend Freire’s point as it relates to the contemporary educational model, the freedom about which he speaks cannot be found within a standardized curriculum. Rather, individual freedom is intrinsically developed with extrinsic humanistic nurturing. Current and misguided models of educational policies and practices, such as those introduced through the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, that, according to authors Lahann and



Reagan (2011), “. . . reduces education policy to a technical activity of fine-tuning data collection and market forces” (p. 15) is based on the banking system that promises high salaried careers and lives of well-being through techno-based studies, but in actuality misuses or misrepresents human freedom. Because of the importance of a liberated educational system, I include liberation as a principle of forgiveness because it validates freedom of thought, expression, and action—in decidedly humanistic terms—for students and teachers alike. In contrast to the banking model, Freire’s pedagogical theories embrace a problem-posing educational model that requires a liberating educational premise based on open dialogue among students and teachers. It is within such models that practices of ethics of forgiveness are important elements to integrate in order to create a pedagogy of forgiveness. As I have previously argued, a pedagogy of forgiveness can be implemented and sustained in today’s educational settings if we are intentional about recognizing the intrinsically human and communal nature of education; that is, education understood as an open process nourished by individual freedom, dialogical relationships, community building, and commitment to democratic values for living, learning, and working. I submit that Freire’s philosophical ideals and his critical pedagogical theories support this argument towards a pedagogy of forgiveness.

**Love.** Along with liberation, I include the ethic of love that is essential in creating an inclusive learning environment. Freire (1970) connects love with dialogue by writing, “Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p. 89) and “Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others” (p. 89). Theorist Griswold (2007), as introduced in Chapter II, also wrote about the inclusion of

love as a value of forgiveness. Similarly, bell hooks (2010) wrote of love in the context of educational settings, stating, “Genuine learning, like love, is always mutual” (p. 64). The mutuality to which she referred is engendered through engaged dialogue between teacher and student. hooks (2010) wrote, “When teachers work to affirm the emotional well-being of students, we are doing the work of love” (p. 160), which lends itself to meaningful experiences in learning. A classroom that embraces and practices love, as hooks has described, is one that practices a pedagogy of forgiveness. Unlike the traditional, one-dimensional lecturing mode of teacher to student, Freire’s (1970) “banking concept of education” (p. 73), hooks (2010) emphasized the importance of “dialectical exchange, which emphasizes considering and reconsidering one’s position, strategies, and values” (p. 38).

**Trust.** As with love, I include trust as an ethic of forgiveness as being essential in building and sustaining moral relationships between students and teachers and students and students. On this view, teaching and learning becomes a practice of building mutual partnerships that constitute communities of learning in which trust and love are experienced as mutually inclusive. These learning environments serve to establish safe learning environments where students and teachers can take risks in sharing ideas, beliefs and their views of the world. To further the importance of trust, I again reference the work by Margaret Urban-Walker (2006) as she addressed the moral context of forgiveness by stating the importance of moral relationships. She defined moral relations as “those relations in which we reciprocally trust each other and ourselves to honor certain values and to avoid crossing certain boundaries out of a sense of responsibility”

(Urban-Walker, 2006, p. 18). Honoring humanistic values is exactly what a pedagogy of forgiveness promotes through the practice of ethics of forgiveness. Not only do people understand human values, they honor them if in an environment that honors the same values. Here, the principle of trust is included as a moral value that directly affects relationships with others, particularly significant in the educational setting where communal existence is dependent upon those relationships, such as a school system. A foundation of reciprocal trust is necessary among a variety of school-based relationships: peer-to-peer, student to teacher, teacher to student, teacher to administrator, etc. Therefore, the individual's propensity to trust that moral values and standards will be practiced in the school setting is essential to the development of hopefulness about oneself and one's relationships throughout the educational experience. When such trust is broken, intentional acts of forgiveness can become the reparative means by which to restore moral relations. Being trustworthy then is essential to building and maintaining moral relations and sets standards on how we are to treat each other. In turn, forgiveness also revives hopefulness that we will be treated with the kind of unconditional human respect that instills "authoritative moral understandings" (Urban-Walker, 2006, p. 164). This means, according to Urban-Walker, a generally accepted understanding of moral behavior. Cultures of trust and hope embedded in educational settings are what I argue to be essential in the practice of pedagogical forgiveness.

**Empathy and sympathy.** Further, I submit, as I did above, that empathy and sympathy are ethics of forgiveness and key elements to the development of a pedagogy of forgiveness. Referencing the work of Hoffman (1981) introduced in Chapter II, he wrote

about empathy as being, “. . . a vicarious, affective response to others” (p. 128) meaning that there must be interactions between and among people if we are to learn to practice empathy, sympathy, and other benevolent behaviors within our relationships. Similarly, the work of Daniel et al. (2014) emphasized the relationships that underscore development of sympathy, moral emotion attributions, moral reasoning, and social justice values across the developmental stages of early childhood and early adolescence. They conclude, therefore, that, “Developing and implementing programs that can effectively stimulate children’s moral emotions, cognitions, and values, as well as their integration, is an important future task” (p. 1211).

**Compassion.** Closely related to the ethics of forgiveness that I have addressed (empathy, sympathy, love, trust, and liberation) is compassion. The importance of teaching compassion within the educational system has been the focus of study by Kohler-Evans and Barnes (2015) who defined compassion as “. . . having a concern for others” (p. 33). It may seem that with this definition compassion mirrors the definition of empathy, however, the authors make this distinction: “Compassion actually combines empathy or an emotional response with altruism or action benefitting another” (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015, p. 33). This definition does not diminish the meaning or practice of empathy. It actually adds a dimension to empathy of action being taken, where empathy may not necessarily do so, but none less important in its contributions to a pedagogy of forgiveness. In fact, compassion and its related ethics of forgiveness are given such importance in the educational setting that national and international organizations have been developed to promote the teaching of compassion in the schools.

One such organization, The Compassionate Schools Initiative in the State of Washington, together with a state university partnership, offer guidelines and guidance to schools that wish to develop a culture of compassion. There is also an international organization, Compassionate Action Network International, that supports compassion initiatives on a global basis.

Based on the belief that compassion can be cultivated, according to Kohler-Evans and Barnes (2015), a case can be made for integrating compassion into school curriculum.

It stands to reason that our ever-growing population and the diverse nature of our schools demand that we seek to understand one another. Surely we can grow students who demonstrate both empathy—experiencing another’s emotion, and altruism—acting upon that feeling in a beneficial way, to make this a more kind and gentle world. (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015, p. 34)

To assist schools in adopting such a culture, the authors have developed a “Model of Influence” (p. 33) which is a theoretical framework consisting of four levels designed to integrate value-oriented teaching. These levels include, and I paraphrase, the development of consciousness, (students’ connections to people, school, and community); acknowledgement of perspectives and beliefs (to foster acceptance of new perspectives); realization of the benefit of self and others (realizing the benefits of compassion on themselves and others); and, taking action and embracing influence (initiating change). These four levels are the basis of classroom activities that teach compassion and that I will offer in the next section.

**Belonging.** To continue with elements that support a pedagogy of forgiveness, I want to include here the desire to belong that, although not considered an ethic of

forgiveness, is an important element to foster the building of a moral community within an educational system. At this point, I will address the human desire to belong to a group or community that is especially important to young people as they develop and grow. This need to belong must be acknowledged by the school system to ensure that there is a safe community where students have choices of groups, both formal and informal, to which they can belong. These groups should foster ethics of forgiveness that mirror a culture of caring. Where there is a communal culture of respect, empathy, love, and care, and other ethics of forgiveness that promote inclusivity, students are less likely to belong to groups that promote oppressive and violent practices.

Maha, one of the Palestinian interviewees, raised this issue as she spoke of the importance of educating Palestinian youth so they have purpose and hope and will be less likely to join terrorist groups. It may be argued that there are plenty of groups within a school system; however, they may not be groups that are inclusive or that support practices of ethics of forgiveness. It is important that the school culture be one of inclusivity and void of oppressive practices in order for groups to reflect the same values.

The need to belong can also be found in the work by Karen Osterman (2000), who wrote about the student's need to be connected to a community in order to feel worthy of love and respect. The relatedness that a community provides "affects people's perceptions of others, leading people to view friends and group members more favorably and to think about them more often and in more complex ways" (Osterman, 2000, p. 327). Ensuring that students are connected to a community within an educational setting that

practices ethics of forgiveness, promotes the development of social justice consciousness and equity, important components within a pedagogy of forgiveness.

As I mentioned above, the communal nature of education makes the school environment the ideal place to practice a pedagogy of forgiveness. Throughout this discussion of theoretical concepts and ethics of forgiveness, the importance of community cannot be escaped. Ethics of forgiveness such as empathy, sympathy, benevolence, trust, and love cannot be practiced in isolation, but must be practiced in a setting where there is ongoing human interaction within a learning environment so these ethics can be put into practice. Theorists included in this study emphasize community, interactions, dialogue, inclusion, and other elements that make community essential in the development of moral relations and social justice consciousness. All these communal references reflect the need for the Other in order to create a worldview based on humanity and human relations. If the goal of the educational system is to prepare young people to become productive adults within a larger, global society, it seems necessary that the educational setting put into practice those factors that prepare them to navigate systems through moral relations and develop a world view of social justice consciousness.

**Community.** An additional element added to the importance of community includes the work of Prilleltensky (2014) who wrote about the importance of community in the human development process. He stated, “The goal of human development is to promote well-being” (p. 289), and this includes building and maintaining strong relationships that require essential social and emotional skills. With regard to the importance of community he further writes, “Communal well-being refers to satisfaction

with one's place in a geographic or relational community" (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 291). Prilleltensky (2014) points out the connection between human development, well-being and social justice awareness and stresses how educational systems need to ensure that all students benefit from a communal setting that prioritizes all three.

If we consider the educational setting as a community, which I do, communal relations are of primary concern to the practice of forgiveness in order for the community to ensure relations are based on moral standards. Communal settings also open possibilities of wrongdoing amongst people as various ideas and views of the world emerge. On this topic, I again reference the writings of Arendt (1958) as first stated in Chapter I. "But trespassing is an everyday occurrence . . . and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on . . ." (p. 240) which occurs as people are exploring their beliefs about the world and those in it. This paradoxical situation is the basis for what Arendt (1958) names the condition of irreversibility (p. 237), meaning that what has been done cannot be undone. I propose that forgiveness is the necessary construct with which to release an offender or the offended from the consequences that naturally occur following a wrongdoing. Arendt wrote, "The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though he did not, and could not have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving" (Arendt, 1958, p. 237). The capacity to act, according to Arendt, creates the vulnerability to experience offensive acts "through the presence of others" (p. 237) and, therefore, the act of forgiveness is similar to the offense in that neither can occur outside of settings of plurality. From the perspective of modern human development, the



educational setting is where offenses will naturally occur and where forgiveness must occur for reparation and the “release from the consequences of what we have done” (p. 237). I maintain that in a culture that promotes caring and humanitarian values, when offenses do occur, there is greater opportunity for healing and moral repair because of the humanistic practices that such a culture promotes on a daily basis and a trust that respect will be restored.

As such, a pedagogy of forgiveness can be viewed as a human to human process that requires human interconnectedness and dialogical interaction and through these processes, human capacities such as empathy, sympathy and other ethics of forgiveness can be developed and nurtured. Therefore, I suggest that an educational or classroom setting, grounded in a spirit of community and interactive dialogue, can provide an optimal setting for practicing a pedagogy of forgiveness in which students can better develop understandings of self and others.

Keeping with a critical pedagogy theme and its connection to a pedagogy of forgiveness, I want to impress the importance of human interactions in the educational system and its direct connection in the development of empathy, sympathy, and other human capacities that I name as ethics of forgiveness. Given these findings, promoting moral relationships in the educational environment *must* include the intentional inclusion of interactions among everyone within the educational system, meaning students, teachers, administrators, and all adults and youth who are a part of the system. Person-to-person interactions are essential to an implementation of ethics of forgiveness, as I have argued, and therefore, practices of ethics of forgiveness are crucial to the development of

social justice consciousness and moral human relations where principles of equality can be applied within a communal setting. I return to the work of Weissbourd et al. (2014), who implied that simply understanding ethics of forgiveness and the need for moral relations is not enough; these elements need to be practiced and applied in order to create the type of culture that embraces a respect for the world. We may even consider the school system a concentrated reflection of the larger world, which, if looked at in this way, prepares young people for lives of well-being that includes careers and the ability to create the change needed in a world of violence and oppressive practices.

To further support a pedagogy of forgiveness, I draw from the work of Valeeva and Demakova (2015) in their study of humanization and education based on the pedagogical concepts and practice of Polish humanist educator, Janusz Korczak. To emphasize their work, they wrote, “[The]ability of the educator to build good relations with his/her students is even more important than adopted methods of teaching, or perfect school buildings, or state-of-the-art facilities” (p. 161). They stress the importance of the personality and skills of the educator in creating relationships with students and argue that the challenge to changing educational systems lies in the integration of meeting the needs of globalization with the development of self-actualization of children. To improve the quality of education, they suggest that a dialogue among national educational systems must take place and address the following:

Modern society is increasingly imperative in education of active, creative, internally free man who is aware of his worth and uniqueness, and able to live in freedom, based on universal values, the relationship of the world and the achievements of civilization. (Valeeva & Demakova, 2015, p. 161)

Their work raises another dimension to the importance of dialogue and interaction, which goes outside the classroom and to interactions with policy makers and others who drive the educational system. These conversations must include arguments that demonstrate the importance of critical pedagogical infused educational systems and how these approaches also enhance academic achievement. The basis for this connection can be argued through an understanding of the effects of what Freire refers to as a place of “authentic liberation” (Freire, 1970, p. 79) where consciousness of the other is liberated. Examples of liberating teaching and learning practices, that I will present in the next section, address this connection between educational models that promote ethics of forgiveness and academic learning. Included in these policy discussions should be to convey the importance of students and teachers finding meaning in their work. As Shapiro (2006) stated, “When we say that something is meaningful we are making a statement about connections. Something becomes meaningful to us because it seems to connect things together in our minds” (p. 78). We can infer from his statement that there is a natural human drive to find meaning, which I call learning. We want students to make connections to themselves, their community, and the world. These connections will require that they have knowledge of and make meaning of many subjects that contribute to lives of well-being.

On a policy level, I would also argue that integration of a pedagogy of forgiveness with established school curriculum is not only possible, but is actually necessary for teachers who choose their profession based on a desire to create environments where students can flourish as independently thinking individuals and as responsible members of the school community. I believe that practices of pedagogies of forgiveness,

specifically those that emphasize equality, empathy, hope and responsible behaviors towards self and others, can coexist with the current economic demands that have replaced humanistic conceptions of learning. I suggest that this can be accomplished if greater attention is paid to *how* students learn as much as *what* students learn.

**Self-worth.** Lastly in this section, I will address the importance of self-worth. Although not specifically addressed as an ethic of forgiveness, I believe that human worth deserves mention in this section because in order to see others through a human lens, individuals must see themselves as worthy. To support my argument, Hampton, as introduced in Chapter I, addressed perceptions of offenses according to one's personal sense of worthiness. Hampton posed, "A theory of human worth involves, first, a conception of what it is for a human being to be valuable or of worth (i.e., is he of instrumental or of intrinsic value?)" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 48). The relevance of self-worth lies in a "ranking"; that is, the view of others as being of lower rank than ourselves, or a view of ourselves as lower in value to others. Either way, a social justice consciousness is not possible so long as a fundamental principle of human equality lies in question. Therefore, it is imperative that we see others and ourselves as having human worth on an equal scale, a view upon which a pedagogy of forgiveness might be based. In educational contexts, I suggest that as teachers and students interact with each other in ways that convey respect and acknowledgement of human worth, a social justice consciousness becomes culturally embedded within the learning environment. I make the connection between one's perception of their own or others' worthiness and social justice

consciousness. As the participants in this study have shared, seeing human qualities in others is essential to the human conditions of equality, dignity, and respect.

In the next session, I will introduce examples of practices that embrace ethics of forgiveness for purposes of creating a culture of care.

### **From Theory to Practice**

To create a pedagogy of forgiveness means to put theoretical concepts to use through practical application. Being part of a world that respects the humanity in others, requires a commitment to social justice consciousness and a belief that change can happen through human interactions with others. Vision and creativity is needed to implement pedagogy of forgiveness practices within a system that may not be ready to adopt practices that result in a cultural change. Although there may be challenges, I argue that there are examples of teaching and learning that include practices of ethics of forgiveness and respect the dignity and abilities of both student and teacher. I will introduce these examples that feature ethics of forgiveness as fundamental elements of teaching and learning.

Expanding on the work of Weissbourd et al. (2014), as discussed above, they additionally offer practical teaching tools that foster what they refer to as creating a culture of care.

Done thoughtfully, role plays and collaborative projects can help students not only take the perspective of others, but also value others, finding threads of kinship in those who seem different, appreciating challenges others have overcome, and recognizing unseen strengths in others. (p. 45)

I argue that along with appreciation of others' perspectives, collaborative projects are an example of how trust can be modeled and taught through these collaborative activities. As students work collaboratively, they develop a reliance and trust with each other through listening and dialogue where problem solving skills can be honed through cooperative behaviors towards a common goal. The principle of trust is essential in building and enhancing collaborative relationships, because with a developing sense of trust the individuals are more likely to invest their time, energy, and faith in the project at hand. At the same time, once students develop a sense of how trust is a positive experience, they are more likely to repeat that behavior in the future as they have internalized the educational experience trusting behavior.

Weissbourd et al. (2014) offered an exercise called circle of concern that encourages students to look beyond their primary relations and gain an acute awareness of all those within the educational system. By engaging students in conversation, teachers have students reflect on their relationships by asking them to place people they care about in circles of concern beginning with the innermost circle (family and close friends) followed by two additional circles in which the teacher encourages students to think of others and add them to their circles. They are encouraged to think outside their identified innermost circle and identify all those with whom they interact—other adults such as bus drivers, cafeteria staff, or custodial staff, or students in the school who are a part of the school community, but not in their inner circle. They may include in this inner circle project interviews with others followed by writing biographies on what they have learned. These activities that promote face-to-face engagement with others that Eisikovits (2004),

introduced in Chapter II, pointed out as essential in developing an understanding and appreciation for the humanism in each other. The point here is that it is not enough to feel empathy, but important to act on it by treating others with respect and human dignity. To emphasize this point, Weissbourd et al. (2014) explained the importance of such an activity in building moral relationships. “Part of widening students’ circle of concern is creating the expectation that all students belong to a community in which they have responsibility for one another and that they will *act* on that responsibility” (p. 44). This exercise in caring and inclusivity encourages students to view themselves as part of a community to which they have a responsibility for others. This particular circle of concern activity fosters an obligation to reach out to those who may be socially marginalized and outside of their inner circle. Reaching out to others in need is a benevolent act that requires empathy and compassion for others. I view these activities as promoting ethics of human existence as described by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1985) whom I referenced in Chapter II. To repeat, his philosophy is based on a responsibility to the Other the moment we see the Other’s face. Going a step further, the inner ring and other similar activities, bring an awareness of each one’s connection to the other and the responsibility (caring, compassion, empathy, etc.) that as humans we have to each other. An activity that fosters students taking responsibility for others and the community, Weissbourd et al. (2014) suggest that students become involved in setting standards that require them to sign a pledge of caring and inclusivity within the school. The authors stress, “Changing social norms means engaging students systematically and substantially on an ongoing basis” (Weissbourd et al., 2014, p. 45). In this way, when

students are involved in setting standards, they internalize a sense of belonging to a community and the responsibility each one has to sustaining a culture of care.

Creating a culture of care is not limited to relationships between students and students and students and adults. Adults need to engage with other adults within the school system such as school administrators and other school staff with the same level of respect and compassion as they do among students and fellow teachers. All adults in the school system will be confronted with situations where stressful situations may cause prejudices or anger to arise and they also need environments where they can reflect on maintaining a culture of care. This way, students see and experience consistency in humanistic behaviors towards others within the educational culture. Creating cultures such as these, “make schools places where more students want to learn and more teachers want to teach, supporting academic goals” (Weissbourd et al., 2014, p. 47).

To provide another example of my vision of a pedagogy of forgiveness, I again reference the work of Kohler-Evans and Barnes (2015) who have developed an activity that infuses compassion into the curriculum that helps students appreciate the benefits of compassion, through the creation of a compassion jar.

Each time a student observes someone showing compassion the student will place a ‘compassion chip’ in the jar. At the end of the week, or daily, the teacher can count the chips or ask students to recount why they placed the chip in the jar. (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015, p. 35)

Through this activity, action and dialogue are combined to reinforce the purpose and impact of compassion on individuals and the larger community. They not only learn to recognize compassion in others, but they are able to value acts of compassion that



occur within their school community and beyond. To reinforce how the activity relates to compassion, the authors wrote, “Once students have developed an awareness or consciousness regarding compassion and have begun to affirm their beliefs, they can begin to more fully understand the benefits of their acts of compassion on their lives and the lives of others” (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015, p. 35). The affirmation of these formed beliefs that students develop as recipients of compassion and providers of compassionate behavior, will be sustained and they will become empowered to create change in a world of chaos and oppression.

To broaden the scope of the school community, the authors also wrote about an organization called *Compassion Games: Survival of the Kindness*, an international initiative that fosters compassionate actions in communities. Annual “coopetitions” are challenges to teams and individuals to engage in acts of kindness through service projects with the goal of creating a world of well-being. One such game is the Global Unity Games that honor the legacy of compassion that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks through collective acts of service and kindness and have taken part in 34 countries with thousands of volunteers. The overall goal is to engage young people in a desire for unity of humanity and change in the world through compassionate action and service. Lastly in this section, I again reference the *Compassionate Schools Initiative* in the State of Washington that offers not only a theoretical framework for creating compassion within the school system, but provides several activities that bases curriculum on compassion and other ethics of forgiveness. The uniqueness of these activities are argued to enhance academic abilities rather than replace them.

Next I will briefly address the teacher as facilitator, in developing a pedagogy of forgiveness. Thus far I have concentrated on why and how students can be receivers and contributors to a culture of care and I want to give attention to the teacher as facilitator of such practices.

### **Teachers' Role in a Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

First, I want to make clear that I do not think that it is only the teacher's responsibility to create a pedagogy of forgiveness. As I have argued, implementing a pedagogy of forgiveness requires a change in the school culture, which means that all of those within the school system have responsibility for building and sustaining that culture. I would include school administrators, those who dictate school and curriculum policy, and parents in this circle of responsibility. For purposes of this chapter, I focus on the classroom teacher who engages in daily face-to-face relationships with students and thus, has the greatest impact on their learning.

I begin by addressing the role of the teacher in moral education as the subject of study by Paolitto (1977) who wrote, "The teacher's knowledge is the starting point and the means by which interaction is stimulated between what is inside the student's head and what exists in the world" (p. 74). She made the distinction between the teacher being an expert in moral education subject matter and being a facilitator of moral education practices through interactive processes among students. She names the teacher (human) requirements as teaching skills that are fundamentals required to create such an environment. "The classroom teacher needs to be competent in establishing an accepted classroom atmosphere in which trust, respect, empathy and fairness are intentionally

fostered as pre-conditions to stimulating moral development” (Paolitto, 1977, p. 74). The human conditions of which she wrote—trust, respect, empathy, fairness—are also ethics of forgiveness that have been argued as essential elements to creating social justice consciousness within the American educational system. Paolitto (1977) stresses the importance of going beyond students simply sharing information to encouraging expressions of each one’s beliefs about the world through “self-reflection and dialogue” (Paolitto, 1977, p. 74). Expressions of beliefs invite engagement of different perspectives and many times conflict that also stimulates exploration of different perspectives. Paolitto (1977) engages students through examples of moral dilemmas that encourage dialogues based on moral reasoning for “stimulating students’ ability to see the world through the eyes of the other” (p. 80). In this way, social consciousness is being developed as students are able to connect or debate their views and emotions with those of others. Paolitto’s (1977) writings emphasize the importance of interaction, which consists of ongoing dialoguing and engagement between students and the teacher. These practices of engagement and moral interactions that Paolitto stresses, are important to a liberation of thoughts and ideas and have been argued as such throughout this study. However, a missing element that needs addressing has to do with the interpersonal beliefs and attitudes of the teacher who also needs to engage with students. In this setting, teachers are expected to encourage and prompt expressions of beliefs and be ready to address emotions that may arise. But, what about the teachers’ emotions when she/he is engaging in the same activity? What preparation is the teacher given for encouraging open dialogue and the emotions that may ensue? It is unlikely that a pedagogy of forgiveness is part of

teacher preparation, and, therefore, there is little consideration to address resulting emotional responses when open dialogue is encouraged. This lack of consideration causes a dilemma especially for the teacher who would rather avoid issues that raise emotional conflict.

I address this dilemma through the work of Britzman (2009), as she addressed the teacher-student relationship within the classroom setting. One of Britzman's basic premises is that a teacher's self-concept is fundamental to a student's ongoing relationship with his or her learning processes. Britzman's (2009) point is that the teacher's painful memories of not knowing, or of those from being a student herself, rise to the surface without warning, reinforcing her acute awareness of painful uncertainty as she experiences it in the present. She adds, "an unconscious history is punctuated by our conscious attitude toward it" (Britzman, 2009, p. 3), meaning that emotions caused by past experiences permeate current situations and transfer to those with whom we have relationships in the present. For example, if a teacher had a painful school experience, and that memory were to be reawakened by an incident in the classroom, negative emotions may arise. If the teacher does not acknowledge these past experiences and the emotions they raise within her, such issues become embedded in the present and, therefore, affect the teacher's current relationships with her students. I argue that these unfinished emotions can become barriers to creating a culture of care. The teacher is responsible for resolving such emotions and issues with students, that need to be acknowledged and worked through. I maintain that attention must be given to the

teacher's well-being if we are to expect her or him to be responsible for students' well-being. Britzman (2009) provides guidance on acknowledging and addressing this issue.

In the following passage, Britzman (2009) addresses how past, painful experiences, for both students and teachers, can emerge in current classroom interactions, thereby impacting the quality of the educational experience.

When thoughts of education are not permitted to leave the classroom, a place that cannot think itself into being without our being there, the concept of education loses its allegorical force, its likeness to the transference and the countertransference, and its nonsemblance with the problem of learning to live with others. (p. 6)

Her reference to transference and countertransference has to do with a current incident causing memories and negative emotions of past experiences that are transferred to others, in this case, the student. Britzman (2009) is asserting that the individual's emotional responses to teaching and learning reflect an accumulation of painful past and present schooling experiences; that each of us—both teacher and student—brings our lived experiences of education, to the present pedagogical relationship. Secondly, a teacher's uncertainty (a natural phenomenon for all humans) may cause anxiety which can also be reflected as a deficit in the teacher that is expressed in negative terms towards students. This is especially imminent if the teacher is to be all-knowing and the student a passive receiver of information, as Freire (1970) wrote. Therefore, as the adult or supposed figure of pedagogical expertise or authority in the teacher-student relationship, the teacher is responsible for maintaining awareness of both her and her students' emotional dispositions as they impact the teaching/learning process. With this awareness,

the teacher can now attempt to foster, as well as repair broken relationships, and instill in students hope for the future. Further, the teacher is able to acknowledge her own painful experiences of the past as a student in order to let them go and not interfere in the present pedagogical relationships. In this way, the teacher's conscious act of letting go results in forgivingness as a benefit to herself and to her students. I would add that this awareness also puts the teacher into a student role as he/she is learning about working through a moral dilemma of past experiences. Thus, the teacher takes on the role of student through this process gaining empathy for her students who struggle with moral dilemmas. It places the teacher in a role as part of the learning environment instead of in an authoritative role.

I raise this point to emphasize the importance of providing the teacher with support to acknowledge and become aware of these occurrences, which are part of human emotions prompted by interactions with others. The recognition of the teacher's social and emotional needs must be considered in development of a pedagogy of forgiveness.

Lastly, I will address some of the barriers and challenges within the present-day American educational system to creation of a pedagogy of forgiveness.

### **Barriers and Challenges to Creating a Pedagogy of Forgiveness**

Political systems understand the tremendous influence that an educational system has on young minds and use this influence through dictates of what and how educational systems should function. Rami (Israeli) addressed this issue directly through his comment about educational systems in both Israel and Palestine. He shared that the priority in both systems is to prepare young people to "sacrifice themselves when the time comes"

meaning that young people are mandated to join the military, following high school, in order to carry out each government's military aim against the other. Both Israeli and Palestinian systems of educating young people are for the sole purpose of preparing them to defend or benefit the sanctions developed by the regions' political structures. Although the American educational system does not mandate military duty following high school graduation, there are other superimposed objectives that result in curricula that do not allow for independent thinking and exploration. Instead, the current system prepares students to meet the needs of society's determined political and economic structures. This concept makes the educational system vulnerable to the edicts of current power structures without regard to the individual learning needs of students. I refer to this process as taking the learning out of education.

To emphasize the view of prescriptive educational standards that act as barriers to a pedagogy of forgiveness, I reference an authoritarian method of teaching about which Gert Biesta (2012) wrote:

Such a conception is oriented towards the idea that teaching is, and ultimately should be, a matter of *control* so that the best and most effective teachers are the ones who are able to steer the whole educational process toward the production of pre-specified 'learning outcomes' or pre-defined identities, such as that of the 'good citizen' or the 'flexible life-long learner.' (Biesta, 2012, p. 35)

To demonstrate how this thinking connects education to stated political and economic structures, I offer the work of David Hursh (2007) who wrote on the effects of neoliberal educational policies that are dominating the current American Educational system. He defined these policies as “. . . promoting standardized testing, accountability,

competition, school choice, and privatization, reflect[ing] the rise and dominance of neoliberal and neoconservative policy discourses over social democratic policy discourses” (Hursh, 2007, p. 494). He went on to argue that these policies “undermine our capacity to maintain a democratic educational system and society” (Hursh, 2007, p. 494). The goal here is to produce people who are able to continue the economic sociopolitical policies that support a growing globalized economy. To allow critical thinking and unscripted discourse among students about the world and those in it, which a democratic educational system would do, puts at risk educated people who will not conform to or not contribute to the established code that has determined the purpose of education. This risk is too great for political power structures to entertain as if a commitment to a democratic educational system were to flourish, current economic and sociopolitical policies may be rejected.

My intent here is not to dissect a neoliberal concept of freedom, but instead to convey its polarization with democratic principles within the American educational system. Thus, the neoliberal view of personal freedom underpins the educational structures of which Hursh (2007) wrote above that are based on testing and competition rather than learning through critical thinking and self-exploration of the world and those in it.

I wish to point out here that there are additional barriers within the educational system that affect students’ self-esteem and realization of true academic ability. Social climates within the school have tremendous effect on marginalization of certain student populations. To my point is a study by Kosciw et al. (2013) who studied school climates



and outcomes for LGBT students. Not surprisingly, they found that “. . . in-school victimization is both directly and indirectly related to diminished educational outcomes” (p. 54). They also found that having supportive adults in the school system led to a less hostile school environment, greater self-esteem, and positive educational outcomes for LGBT students. The personal connections between LGBT students and staff increased engagement and lessened school absences. However, such supportive and inclusive environments must be intentional and practiced by insisting on standards that include empathy, sympathy, benevolence, and other ethics of forgiveness, not only with teachers but with all adults in the school that set cultural standards.

Lastly, I name a misguided educational practice that challenges democratic educational systems, as the grouping of students by perceived abilities. These groupings or rankings through standardized testing, diminish student interactions across the broader spectrum of the student population, and, thus limit exposure to various cultures and worldviews of others that offer a greater richness in the development of a social justice awareness. This process of grouping, also referred to as tracking in certain educational circles, specifies differences in students by creating dichotomies: good/bad, able/unable, gifted/educationally challenged (“exceptional children”), etc., thereby creating identities set solely by arbitrary perceptions attributable to test results. When the makeup of these groupings includes a majority of a certain race or ethnic group, such groupings further create and reinforce perceptions and stereotypical labels of entire student populations, based on ethnicity and race, that challenge social justice practices.

Michael Apple (2001) addressed the effects of tracking in his work that considered the effects market standards have on the educational system. He wrote, “Schools with large numbers of students getting grades A through C are more highly valued than those with lower rates of passing—even though everyone tacitly knows that there is a very strong relationship between school results and poverty” (p. 193).

I have addressed several barriers and challenges to a pedagogy of forgiveness and there are others that have not been addressed, such as exploring the use of technology, which may impose limits on personal interactions. However, given the presented barriers and other challenges that may exist, I maintain that a pedagogy of forgiveness, with intention and commitment to democratic principles, can be integrated into current curriculum within the American educational system. Given the theory and practical applications that I have presented in this chapter, along with the challenges and barriers, there are current models of educational reform based on a pedagogy of forgiveness that are being adopted within this country and internationally. Therefore, we should have hope that a continued effort to drive education through our belief that we are a caring people, as Purpel (1989) wrote, and the teaching of our children will reflect this belief.

### **Chapter Summary**

Throughout this chapter I have argued that a pedagogy of forgiveness is necessary to creating moral relations and social justice consciousness. The belief of the interviewees that forgiveness can be taught reinforces my argument that through a pedagogy of forgiveness, cultures of care within the American educational system can be

created and sustained. Ethics of forgiveness put into practice will be the foundation of this new culture where human dignity and respect become the code of moral relations.

Through the use of theoretical concepts, I make the case that a pedagogy of forgiveness is essential to the learning environment as students are developing personalities and critical skills through interactions with others. The school environment, therefore, is ripe to embrace those human capacities of empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, trust that I refer to as ethics of forgiveness in order for students to develop moral interactions and social justice consciousness. Additionally, the school environment is where students not only learn key principles of moral relations, but they put them into practice through engagement with students and adults within the environment. An environment that practices dialogic engagement and allows students to explore and share beliefs and thoughts about themselves and others, creates strong self-worth and acceptance of different perspectives of others.

To put these theories and beliefs into practice, I offer activities that are based on specific ethics of forgiveness such as empathy, trust, and compassion that can be implemented in the classroom. These are practices that promote a culture of care through shared contributions found in collaborative activities where trust and cooperation are needed to reach a common goal. The activity of circle of concern that was introduced brings an awareness of others outside the students' inner circle to impress the importance of community and all those who contribute to it.

I wanted to give attention to the teacher who is responsible for facilitating and guiding activities that create a school culture based on ethics of forgiveness by

acknowledging that teachers also need support to take on this important task. Teachers as well as students need to be provided with needed support as they build pedagogical relationships with students and others in the school environment.

Lastly, I addressed challenges and barriers that are present in the current American educational system that have replaced cultures of care and concern with mandates of testing and measurements of academic knowledge. Although these challenges and barriers may seem unsurmountable, I have presented initiatives based on ethics of forgiveness that are currently being successfully implemented.

I began this chapter with the stated belief that forgiveness can be taught followed by theoretical concepts of a pedagogy of forgiveness that can be put into practice through activities that promote ethics of forgiveness and, therefore, create a culture of care and concern for others. I end it by giving hope that a pedagogy of forgiveness is possible. All the elements of creating a pedagogy of forgiveness that I have addressed (why it's important, theoretical concepts, practices, teacher supports, and challenges) study participants and I consider to be a recipe for creating a more loving, compassionate, and caring world.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

“I will scatter you among the nations” refers to the first oath, which mandates that the Jews remain scattered and not immigrate as a wall, with a strong hand, to resettle the Holy Land. —Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar (1696-1743)

#### **A Foundation for Human Relationships: Ethics of Forgiveness**

My study on forgiveness can best be described as a journey that has proven to be rich with many personal and academic discoveries. These discoveries have contributed to an expanded understanding of the power of forgiveness, including its meanings and practices, as well as its capacity to inform and create social justice consciousness and moral relations. Moreover, my journey evolved as a process through which I experienced intellectual and emotional enlightenment, further enhanced by my physical journey to the Middle East.

I began this journey with the intent to explore fundamental understandings of forgiveness, such as how forgiveness impacts people’s lives and relationships with others on a personal and global basis. My purpose was to consider whether or not the practice of forgiveness could play a critical role in healing deeply embedded wounds created by longstanding acts of violence and wrongdoing against people and nations. For this purpose, I chose to focus this study on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of which I had personal interest, both as a Jew and as someone committed to creating social justice consciousness. There were two focal points that I wished to include: (a) forgiveness as

repairing wrongdoing and (b) forgiveness as a way to live that would create and sustain moral relations and social justice consciousness. To accomplish my intent, I not only wanted to consider the philosophical, religious, and historical concepts of forgiveness, I also wanted to include actual testimonies by individuals intimately involved with the conflict. Therefore, I chose study subjects directly involved and invested in this issue—some of whom were living in Israel or Palestine, and others living outside of the Middle East who were actively involved in peace efforts. I wanted to explore their views on the possibilities of practicing forgiveness as a healing process. Twelve people (four Israelis, four Palestinians, and four Americans) agreed to share their insights on their worldviews and, most specifically, if and how they viewed forgiveness as being relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The following four research questions (originally stated in Chapter I) underscored the development of the study as a whole and informed the development of my interview questions.

1. What are the problems and challenges associated with the practice of forgiveness in the context of interpersonal relations, cultural identities and practices, and broader social conflicts and violence?
2. What role do ethics of forgiveness play in the repair of wrongdoing that has broken moral relations?
3. What is the relationship between social justice consciousness and the practice of forgiveness?
4. Can forgiveness be taught, and if so, how?

I determined that these four areas of study would be most critically useful to examining the significance of forgiveness as a behavior that could both repair and sustain moral relations among people and nations.

As mentioned above—through philosophical, religious, and historical writings—I intended to create a foundational understanding of forgiveness. However, throughout this research process, I discovered a much richer meaning to forgiveness as a result of my interactions with the study participants and my trip to the Middle East. As such, I found that while philosophical, religious, and historical texts tend to provide a universal understanding of forgiveness as an apology following a wrongdoing, these texts did little to provide an understanding of forgiveness as a moral construct of human behavior and relationships. For this reason, I created the term “ethics of forgiveness” to incorporate those human capacities of empathy, sympathy, love, benevolence, trust, and other capacities that I suggest need to be present as we relate to one another as human beings. On this view, I propose that ethics of forgiveness constitute a construct of moral human behaviors that should guide our interactions; as such, forgiveness should not be waiting on the sidelines for a wrongdoing to occur. With this construct in mind, forgiveness now has a framework of meaning that can be both understood, applied, and taught individually, locally, and globally.

In support, study participants’ responses confirmed the significance of ethics of forgiveness as a foundation for fostering essential humanitarian practices in our daily lives. Furthermore, while interviewees did not use the term ethics of forgiveness, they named various human capacities (including those identified within ethics of forgiveness)

as practices that are necessary to end the conflict. To illustrate the importance of forgiveness as daily practice, Lévinas (1985) determined that humans have an inherent responsibility to each other as soon as one sees another's face. I further suggest that empathy and sympathy, addressed by Wispé (1987) as an internalized human connection, informs our inherent responsibility to each other. Other theorists wrote about human capacities of vulnerability, trust, and risk-taking are necessary to establish moral relations. I distinguished writings by authors who highlighted the importance of human relations (Eisikovits, 2004; Lerner, 2003; Misztal, 2011; Newman, 2013; Shapiro, 2006) from those who presented forgiveness as forswearing anger, resentment, and vengeance (Griswold, 2007; Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Sadler, 2009). This distinction was important to me because it makes the case that forgiveness is more than an isolated apologetic act and should be understood, in my view, as a way of living.

The interviewees made a similar distinction. For example, all were able to relate such capacities as empathy, sympathy, love, benevolence, trust as significant to ending the conflict. However, based on their traditional understanding of forgiveness as an apology, they regarded this conception of forgiveness as having no positive impact in ending the occupation. I outlined these distinctions in Chapter IV where I presented my interview findings. However, I wish to reiterate a significant finding with regard to this issue. Basically, interviewees viewed the traditional concept of forgiveness as having conditions that may not sustain moral repair following a wrongdoing. For example, all interviewees indicated that until the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel ended, there could be no forgiveness. In contrast, they did think it was possible for people to



begin treating each other with human dignity through education and raising awareness of the destruction wrought by Israeli policies against Palestinian human rights.

### **A View of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

I introduce the following two terms, apartheid and ethnic cleansing, in order to illustrate the severity of Israeli government policies and practices against the Palestinian people. While these terms have historically been associated with non-democratic countries, I submit that these terms are applicable to the current relationship between Israel and Palestine.

Apartheid is defined as any system or practice that separates people according to color, ethnicity, caste, etc. (Apartheid, n.d., Definition # 2)

Ethnic cleansing is defined as “the elimination of an unwanted ethnic group or groups from a society, as by genocide or forced emigration.” (Ethnic Cleansing, n.d., Definition #1)

Israeli apartheid policies can be seen in the construction of physical boundaries between the two countries as well as maintaining active military checkpoints, all intended to separate Israelis and Palestinians from one another. Based on my observations while visiting Palestine, I witnessed acts of ethnic cleansing in the forms of food and water restrictions, the movement of families from their homes to refugee camps, and the taking of Palestinian-owned land.

I include these definitions to heighten awareness of the moral responsibility that all humanity has in responding to acts of oppression and violence against others, including a democratic nation such as Israel. It is too easy to justify this kind of treatment as necessary for various reasons or to ignore it as long as it is not directly touching our

lives or those of our loved ones. To pick and choose who will be treated with empathy, compassion, and benevolence based on political or economic concerns creates a false justification for practices of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. It is my hope that the reader will keep in mind the definitions of these two inhumane practices and their affront to human dignity.

### **The Division of Justice**

In the summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to spend two and a half weeks in the occupied territories of Palestine. I witnessed first-hand how the policies of the Israeli government caused oppressive practices of an entire population that lacked any recognition of humanitarian treatment or social justice consciousness. For instance, the Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association (<http://www.addameer.org/statistics>) reported in October 2016 that 7,000 Palestinians, 400 of which are children, were in Israeli prisons. Many Palestinian males have been tortured, as was participant Bassam (Palestinian) by Israeli military forces, and many have been in prison for several years for minor acts of resistance such as throwing rocks at Israeli military personnel, or raising the Palestinian flag in Palestinian territory (forbidden by Israeli government policy).

My home base was Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the central West Bank, territory occupied by Israel. In Appendix B, I have included a map of Israel that shows the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank. Ramallah is part of the West Bank. The word occupied took on a new meaning for me as I traveled around the area. My introduction to the occupation itself occurred on the travel from the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv to Palestinian territory where signs were posted by the Israeli government

forbidding Israelis to enter and also forbidding the taking of photographs. Further, Israeli armed guards, some no older than teenagers, held machine guns ready for battle at designated military checkpoints. I became aware of my privilege as a United States citizen who had been cleared for entrance. As we drove to Ramallah, we saw giant canisters on the tops of buildings that held the city's water supply, controlled by Israel and distributed as little as once a week to Palestinian homes. At a short distance from the checkpoint, the wall that separates Israel from Palestine became visible—a 26-foot cement wall with watch towers and electric fences that keep people from seeing the face of the other. The Israeli government had the wall built to further the separation between Israelis and Palestinians, justifying it as needed security, once again an illustration of an apartheid governmental policy. The wall would become a focal point throughout my travels as I noted some sections spray-painted with various messages and pictures of Israeli soldiers that depicted the oppressive treatment of Palestinian families. Paintings of Israeli soldiers pointing rifles and threatening beatings of children with raised fists covered walls throughout the occupied territories. These sights conveyed a reality that substantiated the testimonies of those interviewees who were working so diligently against the occupation and the destruction that it brought on others.

One of the most compelling experiences was my visit to the Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem in the occupied territory. This camp was in a confined area with chunks of cement on all sides of streets too narrow for vehicles to get through. Housing consisted of cement buildings that were built four to five stories tall in which curtainless windows were opened in hopes of catching a breeze in the over 100-degree heat. The camp was

surrounded by the high separation wall, and there were open trash bins where children were playing. This was the home to Palestinian families who had been displaced from their original homes by the development of Israeli settlements. The camps included a school and a cultural center, but no health clinic. Access to water was continually disrupted by the Israeli government, and sewage was poor. At the cultural center within the camp, young people performed creative forms of resistance through dance and theater, telling their stories in artistic forms with their bodies and voices. Several young residents performed for us in preparation for a trip to Sweden, a country that supports the Palestinian struggle against the occupation. I found it difficult to relate to living in these conditions, wondering how these young people, so innocent, were able to dance and smile. Among my group of travelers, I questioned if these children asked why they were not able to live as all humans should—free from oppression—to learn, explore, and experience the world. Palestinian children and their families have little contact with the outside world, a sentence of isolation imposed by powerful Israeli government forces. I asked people living in the camp about their connections to the outside world, and I was told that a Palestinian American businessman had brought internet services to the West Bank so that young Palestinian students could have the same access to the world as did the Israeli students. Although hundreds of computers were purchased for the schools in the West Bank in recent years, the Israeli government kept the initial shipment at the docks for two years, refusing to bring them into the territory. Additional equipment held was necessary for building the infrastructure for not only computing but also for cell phones and other wireless technology.

Jalazone was a second refugee camp visited. This camp houses 14,000 Palestinians whose homes were destroyed for Israel's control of the land. At the entry of the camp, there is a memorial to children killed by Israelis with their names and date of death carved in several tablets in the center of the memorial. It was overwhelming to see the number of names and ages of so many. We were welcomed by refugees with Turkish coffee and conversation. One member of the camp also lives in Canada and told us that in Canada, he is "equal." However, in Palestine, he has no rights. The refugees were very anxious to tell their stories, adding that when Jewish refugees began coming to the land, Palestinian Arabs welcomed them. Once it was apparent that there was an agenda behind the immigration, things changed. Thus, they have little understanding of why they are being treated with such inhumanity by the Israelis. With several children present during our conversation, one father asked, "What is for the children's future? I cannot say."

As a visitor surrounded by Israeli military, I was constantly aware that one wrong move could very well result in arrests or shooting. I had difficulty imagining what it was like to live every day having to think about my every movement or every word uttered. This trepidation was most acute on a trip to Hebron led by a member of *Breaking the Silence*, an organization of former Israeli soldiers who were bringing an awareness of the inhumane Israeli army tactics against the Palestinian people. Our visit to Hebron, once a vibrant open market area, took place the day after the Israeli army killed a young Palestinian boy. Consequently, the Israeli army was on high alert for anticipated retaliation by Palestinian citizens, which did not take place. The entire street was boarded up with Palestinian homes on one side and Israeli armed military on the other side. The

segregation of Shuhada Street made it seem as though there were two separated communities on the same street; one on the left and one on the right. Palestinian women and children could only leave their homes by going out a back door, and many times having to climb over roofs in order to go outside of their homes. The right to walk down the street where one lives had been taken away from the Palestinian residents of Hebron. Our guide from *Breaking the Silence* was taking a risk leading us into this territory, as the organization was under scrutiny by the Israeli government and being named as traitorous.

Like many Israeli and American Jews, I felt a need to justify or defend these acts of oppression against the Palestinian people. I asked our guide, quite defensively, about the acts of violence against Jews around the world. He replied with something I should have already known, which was to remind me that violence and oppression against Jews could no more be justified than what I was witnessing there in Hebron. It was a profound statement that took away the conditions of oppression—there is no justification for inhumane treatment against others.

A visit to Kibbutz Snir, 100 meters from the Lebanese border, provided an opportunity to inquire into the justification of oppressive practices with an Israeli resident and former Israeli soldier. A kibbutz is a collective community, traditionally based on agriculture. Several in our group confronted this individual with concerns about the oppression that Palestinian people were enduring. Although this former soldier, who had served several tours in the Gaza Strip (another occupied territory) agreed with our protests of oppressive practices, his response was to point out the wealth present in the Gaza Strip, and to suggest that it was the responsibility of those wealthy Palestinian

families to help the rest of the population instead of expecting the Israelis to end the occupation. He indicated that many Israelis did not think the current administration, under Netanyahu, would win the last election; in essence, that without his re-election, there would be opportunity for change. This did not happen. Interestingly, he also shared that the Israeli government is not only causing oppression of Palestinians, but also of Israelis. For example, the residents of Kibbutz Snir raise sheep, and they plant and cultivate produce to sell. Yet, the Israeli government is importing goods from other countries, thus taking away from the livelihood of the Kibbutz by importing water from Turkey and fish from China.

One of the most egregious acts witnessed against a Palestinian family was at the Nassar Farm, Tent of Nations, a generational family-owned farm that was being destroyed in order to build Israeli settlements. The Israeli army brought in construction equipment to cut off access to this farm that depended on seasonal workers who come to harvest olive and fruit trees that are needed in order for the farm and families to survive. The farm-owned land, was surrounded by Israeli settlements, with bulldozers ready to knock down fruit and olive trees to increase Israeli settlements, that soon would encroach on the farm land. The farm, required to get a permit for any building, was not allowed to build structures for housing workers. In response to this obstacle, the farm owner built underground rooms that could not be detected. Farm workers have been coming from around the world to help plant and harvest the produce, living in the underground caves. Israel has responded by not allowing any of the produce to be exported outside of the farm, limiting their market and making them dependent on Israeli goods. In general, the

unlawful taking of Palestinian land has been a longstanding policy of the Israeli government including the land on which the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv is built. According to figures presented by Palestinian leaders, a total of 110,000 acres of Palestinian farmland has been taken by the Israeli government to build the separation wall and Israeli settlements.

As part of our tour we visited a Greek Orthodox church located in the occupied territory. As a result of our meeting with the church's priest, we learned that dehumanizing treatment of people living in the West Bank is an everyday practice. He related an incident that he experienced in attempting to carry out his religious duties. He had a permit to travel to Jerusalem to officiate in services; however, when he got to the border, an Israeli soldier tore up his permit, threw it in his face, and turned him back.

Based on my travels and meetings in the occupied territory, I came to understand how a traditional view of forgiveness (an apologetic act) can seem so inconsequential as a remedy to this conflict. I understand completely interviewees' responses indicating that forgiveness is not possible until the occupation ends. Thus, it is not surprising that people who are removed from their homes where basic needs of water and food are withheld, where any future for children is unknown, and where people are constantly under surveillance by armies with shoot-to-kill policies would not consider forgiveness as a pathway to freedom.

### **Political and Social Viewpoints**

I had the opportunity to meet with political and social leaders in the Palestinian territories in order to learn more about the efforts to end this deeply embedded conflict. I



met with Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, Minister of the Palestinian Economic Council; Wesam Ahmad, Associate Director of the AL-JAQ Center for Applied International Law; Zoughbi Zoughbi, Founder and Director of the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center; Bassam (Palestinian interviewee) and Rami (Israeli interviewee) from the Bereaved Parents' Circle; Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the organization, Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS Movement); Mohammad Barakat of Palestinian Association of Cultural Exchange (PACE); Abdelfattah Abusrour, PhD, General Director, Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society; Shakhe Fadel, a member of the Hamas organization; Hanan Ashrawi, a political activist and executive committee member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); Abuna Elias Chacour, Israeli Archbishop and author of *Blood Brothers*; and, Jean Zaru, Quaker author of *Occupied with Nonviolence*. I also met with other citizens living in the occupied territories.

Most spoke of the conflict as a political and economic issue and not a social or religious conflict. However, political forces tend to use social and religious issues (Holocaust, biblical scripture) in order to hold onto the current power structure, and dismiss protests against Israeli governmental policies. Some saw the withholding of goods, resources, and destruction of farmland as a way to strip Palestinians of economic independence and self-rule for purposes of eventually eliminating the Palestinian culture and population. In a deeper sense, these strategies chip away at the very humanity of the Palestinian people. In addition, one of the educational leaders talked about the importance of an inclusive education project that encompassed Arabs, Jews, and Christians learning together. Although this educational project had been successfully implemented, the

Israeli government ultimately cut off 50% of educational funding that forced these schools to close. In one region of the occupied territory in which one of these integrated schools operated, a strike by educational professionals and parents brought about solidarity of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian teachers responding to the cuts. This united effort received international attention that finally put sufficient pressure on the Israeli government to restore the funding. Based on this and similar incidents, this educational leader emphasized the importance of “bringing the powerful to their senses”. Similar efforts continue through initiatives seeking to connect Jews and Muslims in cooperative projects, such as the Sulha Peace Project (Israelis and Palestinians coming together to create peaceful conflict resolution), Al-Haq (a campaign to bring awareness of Israeli government oppressive practices to the international community), and the Bereaved Parents’ Circle (discussed in detail in Chapter IV). Such efforts as these, extended by individuals and organizations working for peace, aim to raise international awareness of the practices of apartheid and ethnic cleansing exercised by the Israeli government. The basis of their hopes for success rests on a thirst for connection between Jews and Muslims that will transcend historically embedded fears and mistrust, replacing them with affirmation of their common humanity.

Several individuals representing these organizations spoke of the United States’ economic support of the conflict by pledging \$3.8 billion a year to the Israeli government. This money funds military operations used to strip the Palestinians of their land, placing them in refugee camps and building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Several of the political figures with whom I spoke told of many meetings with U.S.

officials who promised to negotiate with Israeli government leaders to stop building Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory and to lift water and gas line blockades. Despite promises to comply, Israel has since broken these agreements and continues to take Palestinian land and withhold access to gas and water. Nonetheless, the U.S. continues to fund military aggression.

Echoing the study participants, the individuals with whom I met informally expressed the belief that treating each other with moral, human intent lies at the heart of any resolution. In this view, I suggest that challenging the occupation requires practices of ethics of forgiveness for which I have argued. Based on the depths of oppression that I witnessed throughout my travels, I propose that greater numbers of the international community visit Palestine in order to expose the dehumanizing effects of the occupation and oppressive practices of the Israeli government. Additionally, all agree on the importance of education couched in a pedagogy of forgiveness in order to learn about each other and dispel the fears perpetrated by the structures of domination currently in place. In this way, education can be foundational to implementing a new social justice consciousness for all living in the region. This is the essence of forgiveness understood as chosen behaviors that can be taught. As author Zaru (2008) wrote, “The road to peace is not paved with exclusivity or with unending hostility. Rather, it grows out of reconciliation, sharing, and community. Ultimately, there can be no military option for Palestinians or Israelis” (p. 1140). This point of view reinforces what I have learned from study participants as well as the many Palestinian citizens and leaders I encountered on

my trip: education grounded in ethics of forgiveness is a far more powerful tool, as opposed to military action, in valuing and validating our shared human condition.

The opportunity to have conversations with all of these people that included their notions of forgiveness added a rich dimension to my understanding of how one word—with universal definition—can at the same time hold nebulous meanings. To address this paradox, I include the words of Sam (Palestinian interviewee) who stated, “Forgiveness is a big word; it means everything and nothing at the same time.” I did not understand his meaning when he first talked about his definition of forgiveness; however, I now see it clearly. In religious and social circles, it is a behavior that is expected and encouraged, yet does nothing to stop the level of oppression and violence that is being perpetrated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, the practice of ethics of forgiveness becomes so vital to creating a foundation of human dignity regardless of religious and political differences.

### **Epilogue: The Journey and Its Impact**

This journey has been personally valuable in terms of providing me a more profound understanding of the essence of humanism; essentially, seeing the Other as my counterpart in the human condition. I have greater insight into recognizing the humanity of others, thus increasing my capacity for feeling and extending compassion throughout my daily lived experiences. Now, I more intentionally view and use forgiveness as a way of relating to others regardless of whether or not a wrongdoing has occurred. Ultimately, the integration of theoretical research, personal interviews, and my trip to the Middle East enriched this study process in a way that I could not have envisioned at the start. More

pointedly, my worldview has changed in that I am much more mindful of the ways in which I approach and interact with people from all walks of life. Furthermore, I have developed an acute sense of responsibility that now requires me to actively intervene when I encounter injustice. Simply stated, my commitment to social justice consciousness has expanded far beyond what I would have expected prior to this experience.

There is much at stake if we, as members of the human community, ignore the pain caused by social injustice. In other words, if we do not value and affirm the lives and rights of all human beings, we end up dehumanizing everyone, including ourselves. Therefore, we must continually have conversations and educate each generation about the value of human existence, including the challenges we face in everyday living as individuals and as contributing members of society. We must integrate ethics of forgiveness in our family structures, classrooms, workplaces, places of worship, political campaigns, and any setting where human interactions take place. As a result of this study, I have learned that there is more to forgiveness than an apology, and it does not take a wrongdoing to practice ethical behaviors. Those working to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have an opportunity to embrace ethics of forgiveness with purpose, demonstrating their commitment to the human condition through moral interactions. In this way, we are more likely to create and sustain a socially just world.

### **Recommendations**

It is difficult to recommend anything more important and actionable from this study other than ending the occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli government.

What I learned from this study is a difficult lesson; that is, Israeli abuse of power, justified by historical trauma (i.e., the Holocaust), does not excuse their oppressive practices against Palestinian people, nor does it nurture a social justice consciousness. Therefore, I propose that the current challenge is to implement a pedagogy of forgiveness in both educational and communal settings. Study participants agreed that these practices are not only imperative in ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but are imaginable and feasible within the current social and political climate.

Scholarly work must cast a broader net to critically examine practices of forgiveness that have impacted people, communities, and nations. The following could be studied as examples of practices of forgiveness: (a) the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, following the abolition of Apartheid; (b) the Justice and Reconciliation process in Rwanda, following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi; and (c) *Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish School* by John Ruth, an account of the killing of five young girls in an Amish schoolhouse.

Scholarly work must also include reaching out to people who have wrestled deeply with personal trauma in their efforts to understand how forgiveness impacts the healing process and affects one's worldview. For example, I had the opportunity to speak with a young man whose parents were victims of the Rwanda genocide. He shared with me his views on forgiveness as part of the Justice and Reconciliation process mirroring a key finding of the study; that is, he sees forgiveness as a weakness, while yet he embraces ethics of forgiveness as a foundation for social justice practices. These accounts, and more like them, will raise many questions asking how forgiveness can be practiced and

sustained. At the same time, this study's findings offer some insights into how our worldviews affect our treatment of others. In turn, I would recommend that future studies on forgiveness focus on people and their lived experiences with trauma and forgiveness as related to the development and practice of social justice consciousness. As humans, we are capable of change, suggesting that studies such as this one provide us with the recipes to make that change happen.

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**APPENDIX A**

**CODING EXAMPLES**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Organization Description</b>	<b>Information on the organization</b>	<b>Relationship to Conflict</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>	<b>Supporting Materials</b>
Dr. Steve (American Jew)	Dermatologist; director and creator of Promised Land Museum, an online museum	Jewish museum of the Palestine experience	Advocate for change and equality; from a Jewish perspective, raise consciousness of how Israel is oppressing Palestinians	Doctor, peace activist, lecturer	promisedlandmuseum.org	
Gideon (Israeli)	Israeli activist, speaker, author, columnist for “Haaretz Daily”	Does not belong to any one organization		Father fled Nazi Germany in 1939. Gideon raised with “typical propaganda”; however, came to see the occupation as violence against Palestinians; Served in the Israeli army as a reporter for Israeli Army Radio	videos – National Press Club; has been given several awards, but also receives death threats. Shared peace award with Mitri Raheb a Palestinian pastor.	

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Preliminary Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes/ Individual	Themes/ Collective	Data Structure
Yes	Steve American Jew	Director and creator of Promised Land Museum, an online museum a project of the Coalition for Peace with Justice; Dermatologist	having wrong ideas about motivations of people in other groups		making negative judgments on others based on assumptions	how we view the world	ethics of forgiveness	
			Learned that what was taught in Jewish upbringing about the founding of Israel had been mistaken					
			Does not think that Israeli's and Palestinian's should be separated (two-states)		understanding that people are all human	humanism	humanism	humanism
			What looks different to us is the same from above – G-d		in conflict, differences are prevalent while likenesses are not recognized		seeing the other	seeing the face
			Rivalries – the two (used Duke/UNC) involved see each other in negative terms. Those from outside see both as universities		allegiance; justification of wrongdoing (in order to protect selves)	challenges to seeing humanism in all	seeing the other	
			forgiveness is a good thing					
			Justify killing for peace and justice	"Now, when Israel says, 'listen we made a big mistake; come back and we will live in peace. That is the point of forgiveness'"	taking responsibility for mistakes	ability to move on	healing historical trauma	historical trauma

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Preliminary Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes/ Individual	Themes/ Collective	Data Structure
			underlying principle: treat everyone as equal		treating others as equal	equality	social justice	
			Must see the bigger picture, not just one's assumptions					
			In this conflict both sides have historical trauma so one doesn't have more than the other		historical trauma locks you in	historical trauma	historical trauma	
			Dialogue must happen between Palestinians and Israeli's		Dialogue and being able to see the global picture	dialogue	seeing the other – engaging	seeing the face
			Must move past of each side thinking they are on the side of goodness					
			Social justice is the Golden Rule		Social justice about how we treat others	social justice and equality	humanism & equality	humanism & equality
			A general consciousness change to begin seeing the other differently		Deciding to change how we view the other		seeing the other	seeing the face
			there needs to be role modeling for forgiveness			pedagogy	teaching forgiveness	education
Yes	Gideon Israeli	Columnist for “Haaretz” in Israel. Several awards for peace work	Journalist with main mission to document crimes as result of the Israeli occupation		exposing practices of violence		exposing oppression	
			Refers to South Africa where reconciliation came after not before the problems are solved.	“I think forgiveness will be an essential state between Israel and Palestine, but it can only come after the solution,				

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Preliminary Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes/ Individual	Themes/ Collective	Data Structure
				not before”.				
			Looking at others as human is a very essential point		Humanism		humanism	
			Dehumanization of Palestinians in the eyes of Israel		Must see Palestinians as humans and as equals		seeing the other	seeing the face
			There cannot be justice without seeing the other as equal to you		humanism = equality		equality	
			Forgiveness is irrelevant to current conditions in Israel	“In my part of the world forgiveness right now is an irrelevant term because the time has not come either for the Israeli’s to forgive the Palestinian’s nor will Palestinian’s forgive Israel”	Forgiveness only possible after the occupation ends		end to occupation before forgiveness	forgiveness following wrongdoing
			Historical trauma plays a huge role; People can overcome trauma; politicians use trauma for their own purposes; manipulation		Historical trauma has a place, but is not an excuse		historical trauma	historical trauma
			A new generation can overcome trauma depending on what heritage and lessons are being passed on		Possible hope with the new generation		ethics of forgiveness	ethics of forgiveness
			Parts of Europe have been able to get over the trauma and reconcile					

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Preliminary Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes/ Individual	Themes/ Collective	Data Structure
			So much hatred and violence leaves no room for forgiveness		Hatred, violence and injustice overshadows forgiveness		cannot forgive while living with violence	theoretical – after violence
			As long as there is no justice, the rest is irrelevant	“A just solution must come first and this is far away right now”				
			Forgiveness cannot happen when the evil continues		forgiveness following wrongdoing		following wrongdoing	
			There must be justice, not specifically social justice, but justice		Justice vs social justice		justice/social justice	
			Forgiveness must be in the right context in order to be taught. Conditions are not there		forgiveness cannot be taught during oppressive conditions		cannot forgive while living with violence	
			Those that are working on peace will not succeed until there is justice		Peace efforts beginning		justice before peace	
			Has no hope for a political solution as things stand now in Israel; the occupation will not stop					
				“I don’t work for peace; I work for justice”	No peace without justice		justice before peace	
			There are no signs that Israel is going to change		Lack of hope			
			Anger at US for supporting Israel in the way it now does					
			Israeli-Palestinian conflict: each one		Victimization		Who is the victim? Why important?	

Permission to Use Name	Interviewee	Affiliation	Preliminary Codes	Quotes	Final Codes	Themes/ Individual	Themes/ Collective	Data Structure
			thinks they are the victim					
			The most powerful military in the Middle East sees itself as fragile	“This fragility enables it to act out in horrific ways while still seeing themselves as victims”				
			Prolonged nature of the occupation, nearing seven decades, is prolonged and chronic		Historical trauma	Historical trauma	Getting over trauma	historical trauma
			Prolonged situation of dominance makes the need for forgiveness even more urgent					
			Forgiveness is the glue; for society to begin to reconstitute itself; begin to rebuild the social fabric	“Forgiveness is the driving force, it is the fundamental element to be able to move in that direction”	Forgiveness and social fabric	forgiveness as moral repair/social fabric	forgiveness = moral repair	Moral repair
			Seeing the human capacity for good and for evil; violence is inevitable		human capacity for evil and good	human capacity for good and evil	humanism – choices of good and evil	humanism

## APPENDIX B

## ISRAEL AND OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

